PLAYS

SIXTH SERIES

THE FOREST
OLD ENGLISH
THE SHOW

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GALSWORTHY

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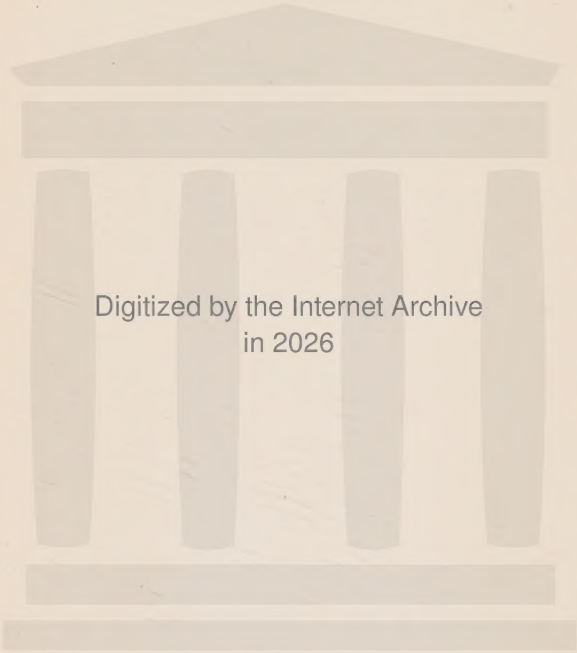
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PLAYS

SIXTH SERIES

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

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SIXTH SERIES

THE FOREST
OLD ENGLISH
THE SHOW

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1926

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To
JOHN DRINKWATER

THE FOREST

IN FOUR ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Tregay	War Correspondent
Adrian Bastaple	Financier
Farrell	His Confidential Man
Charles Stanforth	Editor of a Liberal paper
Lord Elderleigh	Nonconformist Peer
Pole Revers	Of the Foreign Office
Robert Beton	Imperialist
Baron Zimbosch	Belgian
Samway	Elephant-hunter
John Strood	Explorer
Herrick	Naturalist
Captain Lockyer	Members of Strood's Expedition
Dr. Franks	Members of Strood's Expedition
James Collie	Members of Strood's Expedition
Amina	Half-caste Arab Girl
Samehda	Her Brother
Sadig	Strood's Berberine Servant
Mahmoud	Soudanese Sergeant

Soudanese Soldiers, Carriers, Savages

Time: *End of Last Century*

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION AT THE ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE, ON MARCH 6, 1924

TREGAY	By	Mr. Nicholas Hannen
FARRELL	"	Mr. J. H. Roberts
ADRIAN BASTAPLE	"	Mr. Franklyn Dyall
LORD ELDERLEIGH	"	Mr. A. Carlaw Grand
STANFORTH	"	Mr. Campbell Gullan
POLE REVERS	"	Mr. Felix Aylmer
ROBERT BETON	"	Mr. Edward Irwin
BARON ZIMBOSCH	"	Mr. Edward Rigby
JOHN STROOD	"	Mr. Leslie Banks
SAMWAY	"	Mr. William E. Hallman
HERRICK	"	Mr. John Howell
AMINA	"	Miss Hermione Baddeley
SADIG	"	Mr. David Hallam
CAPTAIN LOCKYER	"	Mr. Ian Hunter
DR. FRANKS	"	Mr. H. R. Hignett
JAMES COLLIE	"	Mr. Campbell Gullan
MAHMOUD	"	Mr. Qwashie
SAMEHDA	"	Mr. Felix Aylmer

ACT I

SCENE I. Bastaple's outer sanctum in the City of London. September 1898.

ACT II

SCENE I. Samway's Bungalow on the Albert Edward Nyanza. October.

SCENE II. A Native Hut on the West Bank of the Lualaba River. Christmas 1898.

SCENE III. The Same. Three days later.

ACT III.

SCENE I. Lockyer's Tent in the Forest, four marches from the Lualaba.

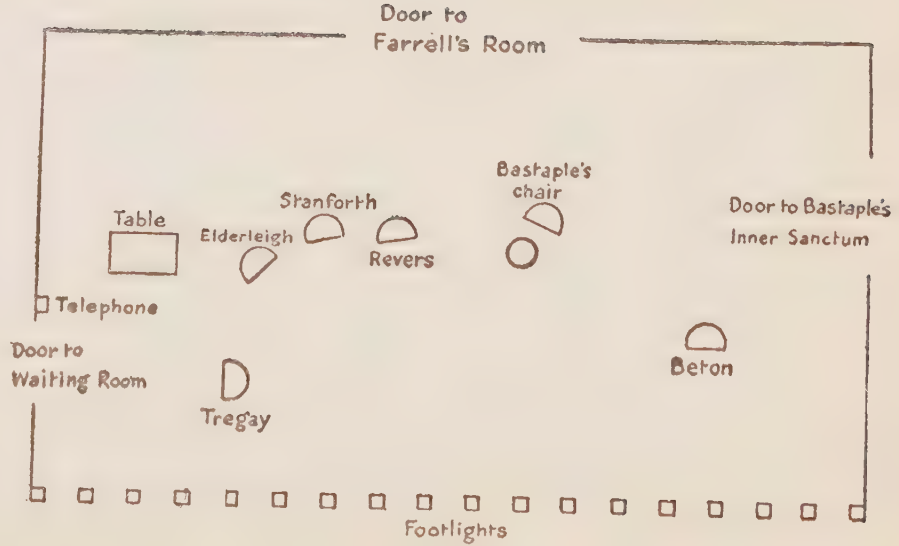
SCENE II. A clearing of the Forest, the following day.

ACT IV

SCENE I. Bastaple's outer sanctum. June 1899.

SCENE II. The Same. Four days later.

Note.—In this play none of the characters represent real persons, alive or dead. They are wholly imaginary. Nor are its history and geography entirely devoid of fancy.


Door to
Farrell's Room
Bastaple's
chair
Stanforth
Table
Elderleigh
Revers
Door to Bastaple's
Inner Sanctum
Telephone
Door to
Waiting Room
Beron
Tregay
Footlights

ACT I

The sanctum of Adrian Bastaple, in the City of London, furnished in the style of the nineties, solid and comfortable—living-room rather than office. On a small table centre is a box of cigars with a little spirit flame (as in tobacconists' shops) alight beside it. A door on the Left leads to an inner sanctuary. A door on the Right to a waiting-room; a door Back to the room of Farrell, Bastaple's confidential man. There is a telephone on the Right of the room.

As the curtain rises FARRELL *enters from his room, ushering in* TREGAY. FARRELL *is perhaps forty-five; a rather small man with eyes that show a quick brain behind a mild and nervy manner. His face has the habit of little wandering smiles and quick upward looks.* TREGAY *is a bronzed, upstanding man of forty, with a clipped fair beard, fine silky hair, and a face at once sanguine and sardonic.*

TREGAY. Before my time, Mr. Farrell. Perhaps you can tell me what the deuce I've come for?

FARRELL. Your advantage, Mr. Tregay, I trust; sit down, sir.

It is noticeable that chairs have been arranged more or less in radiation from a deep arm-chair with the little table beside it.

TREGAY. Thought it might have been your chief's, Mr. Farrell; [*reversing a chair and sitting astride of it*] unless your City of London has changed its spots since I saw it last.

FARRELL. The City! Oh! no, sir. It doesn't change.

TREGAY. What's the latest financial circus? Haven't seen you since that Matabeleland racket, three years ago—in '95. How's Adrian Bastaple? Successful as ever?

FARRELL. [*With a nervous look at the sanctuary on the Left*] Oh! yes, sir—quite!

TREGAY. Well! Why have I been asked into the lion's den? 'Um!

FARRELL. [*With again a nervous look*] You've been away a long time, Mr. Tregay. China, was it?

TREGAY. And Peru. Good places to study finance while the blood flows. You should go yourself and see finance in flower—generally red!

FARRELL. A little hard on finance; necessary evil, Mr. Tregay, believe me—like—like manure.

TREGAY. Not bad! [*Pointing to the chairs*] Before they come, put me wise, as the Yanks say. What's Charles Stanforth doing in this galley? Adrian Bastaple and a Liberal Daily is not a marriage made in heaven. Any offspring so far?

FARRELL. Well, they're—they're expecting delivery to-day, sir.

TREGAY. What a little mongrel it'll be! Who else is coming to the ceremony?

[FARRELL *gives him one of his quick looks.*

FARRELL. Er—Lord Elderleigh.

TREGAY. Old Elderleigh of the Bible League? Ye gods! What's the next portent?

FARRELL. Mr. Robert Beton.

TREGAY. [*Absorbed*] Robert Beton? Empire and the Bible! Well, that's all right. Who else?

FARRELL. Mr. Pole Revers.

TREGAY. Foreign Office!

FARRELL. Oh! Not officially. Under the rose, sir.

TREGAY. You bet! Well, the ingredients are all there for some fine tummy upsets. Am I the bicarbonate of soda?

FARRELL. Didn't Mr. Stanforth tell you?

TREGAY. [*Shaking his head*] Just got a message to come here at five.

FARRELL. Perhaps I oughtn't——

TREGAY. Out with it, Mr. Farrell.

FARRELL. Well, sir, your experience of Africa, and your reputation for lost causes——

TREGAY. Adrian Bastaple and a lost cause! Something's got loose!

FARRELL. Oh! no! Mr. Bastaple has quite set his heart——

TREGAY. Then there's money in it?

FARRELL. No, sir, a pure matter of benevolence.

[*One of his looks.*

TREGAY. Now I think of it, I *have* seen his name in charity lists.

FARRELL. You have, sir—I see to that.

TREGAY. Ah! No limit to the things you do for him. Proud position, Mr. Farrell. What's the pure benevolence this time?

FARRELL. I'm sure it'll have your sympathy, sir; it's—the slave trade.

TREGAY. What! in the British Empire?

FARRELL. [*With a smile*] Oh! no, sir—oh! no!

TREGAY. Where then?

FARRELL. Congo.

TREGAY. But the Belgians rousted them out a year or two ago.

FARRELL. Well—[*with one of his looks*] yes. [*The door on the Left is opened*] Here is Mr. Bastaple. Mr. Tregay, sir.

TREGAY *rises from the chair he has been riding, and, reversing it, bows to the advancing figure.* ADRIAN BASTAPLE *is a man with a thick trunk and rather short neck, iron-grey hair once dark, subfusc, rather olive complexion, and heavy-lidded eyes with power in them. He may be sixty-five, and wears a frock coat and a dark cravat of the nineties, with a pearl pin. He speaks without accent, but with a slight thickness of voice, as if he were lined with leather.*

BASTAPLE. Mr. Tregay. Pleased to meet you.

Farrell, cigars. Smoke cigars, Mr. Tregay? [*Taking the box from* Farrell] Light up.

Tregay. [*Taking one and lighting it*] Thank you! [*Reading the label, with a quizzical look at Bastaple*] Divinos!

Farrell, *after a look from one to the other, goes back to his room.*

Bastaple. When did you get back?

Tregay. Yesterday.

Bastaple. Interesting time?

Tregay. Very.

Bastaple. Fine life a war correspondent's.

Tregay. When you don't live it, Mr. Bastaple.

Bastaple. [*With a steady look*] I enjoy your writing, those Boxers that got messed up at that river—very powerful. Not much light in China, I think?

Tregay. Not much light anywhere.

Bastaple. What are you doing now you're back?

Tregay. Time to smell Piccadilly, and I shall be at the service of the angels of light.

Farrell. [*Entering*] Lord Elderleigh, sir; Mr. Stanforth.

Tregay. Talk of—, and you hear——

Lord Elderleigh *is a white-bearded, pink-faced person, short and bird-like, with a quick step and turn of the head;* Charles Stanforth *a polished looking man between forty and fifty.*

Elderleigh, Mr. Bastaple?

[*He extends half a hand.*

STANFORTH. Ah! Tregay. You got my message then. [*He shakes hands with* TREGAY.] Glad you're back safe and sound.

BASTAPLE. Sit down, gentlemen. Cigars, Farrell.

He himself sits in the armchair by the small table. They all seat themselves. LORD ELDERLEIGH *has refused to smoke;* STANFORTH *has lighted one of his own cigarettes.*

ELDERLEIGH. I hope we're going to clinch things to-day, Stanforth. Time's getting on.

FARRELL. [*From the doorway*] Mr. Pole Revers.

POLE REVERS *is quick, tall, dark, and a bit of a dandy. He bows to* BASTAPLE, *nods to* STANFORTH *and* LORD ELDERLEIGH, *stares at* TREGAY, *and takes a chair.*

FARRELL. [*From the doorway*] Mr. Robert Beton.

He stands watching the company a moment. BETON *comes in, filling the eye with his large head on a short body and the breadth of his forehead. His eyes have power—epileptic eyes, seeing visions. He takes the end chair to the left of* BASTAPLE.

BETON. How do, my lord? How do, Stanforth? Revers, yours.

[FARRELL *goes.*

BASTAPLE. [*Introducing*] Mr. Tregay.

BETON *leans forward, staring, and makes an amicable movement of the hand at Tregay.*

BETON. Ah! Mr. Tregay, glad to meet you. I suggested your name to Mr. Stanforth. You know a Dr. Franks, I believe?

TREGAY. Franks! Clement Franks? My cousin—Out at Mombasa.

BETON. Exactly! You know what we're here for?

TREGAY. Limelight on the slave trade, is it?

BETON. Yes. Your cousin suggested you could help to throw it.

STANFORTH. East of the Congo, Tregay. You were out there in '94, wasn't it?

[TREGAY *nods.*

STANFORTH. Well, since then the Belgians have had two campaigns. But we're convinced the job's only been half done.

ELDERLEIGH. What's that country like, Mr. Tregay?

TREGAY. Forest thick as the city of London, my lord; fever—cannibals—all the luxuries.

STANFORTH. Quite; but we Liberals feel——

TREGAY. That you want a war-cry.

[STANFORTH *turns on him a stony stare.*

ELDERLEIGH. Mr. Beton, you spoke of having a man; is he ready?

BETON. At Mombasa, waiting for the word "Go." John Strood.

REVERS. Strood! H'm!

STANFORTH. The man who discovered——?

REVERS. Not too savoury, that, Beton.

BETON. Well, he's right for this business, it's

no child's play. Will the F.O. let him through Uganda? That's what we want to know from you, Revers.

REVERS. [*To* TREGAY] Where must he start from to get among the slavers?

TREGAY. Albert Edward Nyanza—south end.

BETON. That's what he says himself.

REVERS. What's said here goes no further? [*He looks for signs of assent, which are given to him*] Uganda's still very disturbed, but I don't think the authorities will hinder a reconnaissance with such an object. Discretion though, our hands are full.

ELDERLEIGH. Beton, you can—what's that nice expression?—tip him the wink, eh?

[BETON *nods.*

Good! Now—ways and means? Our League will venture a thousand. What will your paper do, Stanforth?

STANFORTH. Two thousand.

ELDERLEIGH. I'm afraid it'll cost more.

BETON. Mr. Tregay? An expedition starting from the Albert Edward covering country between the lakes and the Upper Congo, or Lualaba river, don't they call it?

TREGAY. [*Nodding*] About the size of Spain.

BETON. Well? What do you say?

TREGAY. Ten thousand'll be under the mark before you've done.

ELDERLEIGH. Dear me! Ten thousand! Well, for such a cause—— [*Looking at* BETON.

BETON. Idealism will put up three. What says Finance? [*He turns to* BASTAPLE.

BASTAPLE. [*Taking his cigar from his mouth*] I asked you to come here, gentlemen, at Mr. Beton's suggestion. You'll forgive a little frankness. [*During the forthcoming he looks mainly at* TREGAY] Financiers are never credited with doing anything for nothing. Admit it! We all have our own fish to fry. Lord Elderleigh fries the devil; Mr. Stanforth the Tories.

STANFORTH. Same thing.

BASTAPLE. Mr. Revers fries the virtue of neighbouring States, and Mr. Beton—fries his dreams. That leaves me. Well! I'd like to fry my reputation a little, gentlemen. I'd like a little kudos—I put up—ten thousand.

[*There is a moment's silence.*

TREGAY. [*Taking his cigar from his mouth*] Bra—vo!

ELDERLEIGH. Very generous, sir; very generous indeed. Will you put that in writing for us?

BASTAPLE. Glad to see religion has a sense of business, my lord.

ELDERLEIGH. Grievous experience, Mr. Bastaple. Well, that takes a weight off our minds. We can go ahead, then.

STANFORTH. Do we accept Strood?

REVERS. Properly warned.

BETON. Certainly.

REVERS. Then you want us to cable Mombasa

to give them a pass through Uganda to the Albert Edward.

BETON. That's it.

ELDERLEIGH. Would Mr. Tregay go out for us too? There couldn't be a stronger pen to bring things home to the British public.

TREGAY. What do you want brought home, my lord?

ELDERLEIGH. My dear Mr. Tregay, the truth.

TREGAY. Will *your* people pay two thousand, Stanforth, to be told the truth?

STANFORTH. What do you mean?

TREGAY. Suppose the Belgians are doing their best?

STANFORTH. We mustn't fall foul of the Belgians, of course; but this blind eye of theirs towards the slave trade——

TREGAY. Both ways—I see; true Liberalism.

[*Again* STANFORTH *turns on him a stony stare.*

BETON. [*To* TREGAY] Do you know Strood?

[TREGAY *nods.*

What d'you think of him?

TREGAY. Drives things through; but not Stanley's hold on the black man.

BETON. Ah! But Stanley! Stanley! Well, then I can set Strood in motion? [*He rises, and all follow suit*] I'll cable him fully, and draw on you, Bastaple?

BASTAPLE *nods, and there is a general break up.*

Mr. Tregay, your address is——?

TREGAY. [*Hands him a card; then advancing—rather low*] Good-bye, Mr. Bastaple. Fine investment!

BASTAPLE *stares at him steadily.* TREGAY *follows the others out.*

BETON. [*Coming from the door*] Now then, Bastaple!

[BASTAPLE *reseats himself at the little table.* We've got 'em side-tracked.

BASTAPLE. Long and expensive way round, Mr. Beton.

BETON. Can't be helped. Our coolie labour scheme is the only thing to make quick development possible in Africa. And it won't stand a dog's chance if the unco' guid aren't already employed elsewhere in bettering their neighbours. They started this anti-slavery racket themselves by God's own mercy! Old Elderleigh and brisk salvation; Stanforth and his precious principles. Yes, Bastaple, I've got my dreams. Stanley used to say that central forest of his reminded him of London—the swarm and push, the struggle for mere existence, the frightful riot of vitality without aim or end, but a fight for food and light and air. [*Walking*] Well, like him, in the early mornings I've watched the swarms of human ants coming in over these bridges—pale, overworked, dwarfed, stoop-shouldered—the ghastly, teeming struggle of it! [*Standing still*] By God, Bastaple, it makes you dream, it gives you nightmare. And all those great spaces in South Africa, Canada, Australia, that want populations, white

populations, where people can live a man's life, not a louse's! And fellows like Elderleigh, Stanforth, and their kidney—if we hadn't got this slave-trade red herring to draw across the trail, the hullabaloo they'd raise over my coolie scheme.

BASTAPLE. When's your General Meeting of South African Concessions?

BETON. Next July—we've got ten months. Strood will do it for us, if we hurry him. We'll have this anti-slavery campaign in full blast.

BASTAPLE. Wait till the very morning of the Meeting, then plump Strood's report on the slave trade into the papers. If it's sensational enough, the coolie scheme will go through and not a dog bark.

BETON. That's it, Bastaple, that's it. [*Off in his dreams*] A real life for hundreds of thousands of these poor struggling devils here, who turn me sick to look at them.

BASTAPLE. [*Watching him*] You will die a great man, Mr. Beton.

BETON. Well, look at this country, Bastaple. "Nothing so ugly in forest nature as the visible selfish rush towards the sky, in a clearing . . . the uproar of the rush, the fierce, heartless jostling and trampling." The life of that forest of Stanley's, Bastaple, is our big city life.

[BASTAPLE *has a little smile on his face.*

Ah! to you that's "all me eye and Betty Martin"; I know, I know. Flim-flam—that about your reputation—eh? Well? Once get coolie labour, and up

go the shares of all our companies, with a bound, sir, with a bound.

BASTAPLE. Our friend Tregay?

BETON. What about him?

BASTAPLE. [*Shaking his head*] Mustn't go out. He's got a nose!

BETON. H'm! They seem to want him to.

BASTAPLE. Leave that to me. Do you use a code with Strood?

[BETON *nods.*

And trust him?

BETON. Certainly.

BASTAPLE. Is he an Empire man?

BETON. Rather!

BASTAPLE. Then code him that he needn't mind treading on the Belgians' toes. The more fuss the better. Nothing like the sins of your neighbours for diverting attention from your own.

BETON. [*With a laugh*] I don't admit sin.

BASTAPLE. Never yet met anyone who did. *I'll* cable Strood credit at Mombasa. If we want speed, we must pay for it. [*He writes. Then looking up*] Mr. Beton, I find these dreams of yours very interesting. The struggle for existence! So you think we can improve on Nature?

BETON. I remember my boyhood, Bastaple. My father left six of us in Glasgow without a penny, and jungle there as thick as here. I went out with my little billhook and cut a path—we all did. But we suffered. Until I was nigh on forty I did as I was told, and it didn't suit me. Food I got, but

light and air—no. Well, I've shot up among the tops, into the sunlight; but I haven't forgotten. I want to save thousands of boys such as I was, want them to have decent lives. What was your boyhood like?

BASTAPLE. [*With a slow puff of smoke*] Never had one.

BETON. Ah! One feels there's a lot behind you. You're a kind of mystery man. Well, I'm going to code that cable. Here's Tregay's address. [*He hands the card*] I don't thank you; it's as much your interest as mine. Without coolie labour the shares can't rise. Good-night!

BASTAPLE. [*Holding out his hand*] Cigar?

BETON. No, thanks.

He shakes the outstretched hand and goes out, Back.

BASTAPLE *sinks deeper in his chair, with a smile flickering about his lips and his brooding eyes. He strikes a bell on the little table.* FARRELL *enters.*

BASTAPLE. What's my total holding now in all the companies of South African Concessions?

FARRELL. Three hundred and fifty-seven thousand shares, sir.

BASTAPLE. Standing me—in——?

FARRELL. Three hundred and twelve thousand pounds.

BASTAPLE. How many in my name?

FARRELL. About a hundred thousand, sir; the rest are in dummies.

BASTAPLE. I want them *all* in dummies, Farrell, except—twenty thousand. Get that done quietly, before Christmas.

FARRELL. Yes, sir.

BASTAPLE. Baron Zimbosch here yet?

FARRELL. In the waiting-room, sir.

BASTAPLE. [*Nodding*] Ask him in.

FARRELL. [*Goes to the door, Right, opens it, and says*] Will you come in, Baron?

BARON ZIMBOSCH *enters; a personable man with a brown beard parted in two and stiffish hair. He wears a frock-coat and carries a top hat.*

FARRELL *shuts the door and retires to his own room.*

BASTAPLE. Evening, Baron.

ZIMBOSCH. [*In goodish English with a slight accent*] Good evening, Mr. Bastaple.

BASTAPLE. What news for me?

ZIMBOSCH. [*With a shrug*] Well—for anything precise it is too early in the morning as you say. But Dr. Leyds is active—my hat! He is active.

BASTAPLE. Well! What of that?

ZIMBOSCH. [*Sinking his voice*] War, Mr. Bastaple, war.

BASTAPLE. Phew! That's a long jump.

ZIMBOSCH. You think? Dr. Leyds gives Kruger always the impression that Europe is favourable to the Boers. These Hollanders they lead him by the nose. Oom Paul Kruger—they play with that obsti-

nate old man. And they want war, these Hollanders. And Majuba, Mr. Bastaple—the English have never forgotten Majuba—they never will till they wipe the eye. And the Uitlanders—will they get what they want from Paul Kruger? Not much. About this time next year, Mr. Bastaple—war, or I am a Dutchman, as you say.

BASTAPLE. Old Kruger's too slim. What chance have the Boers, Baron?

ZIMBOSCH. Mr. Bastaple, the Englishman never sees his enemy—he eats too much fog and Yorkshire puddin'—so he is never ready. What Englishman believes he is at war till he 'as been beaten three or four time? Then he begins to scratch his head and say, "Dear me, there is a war on!"

BASTAPLE. And how do you Congo people view it?

ZIMBOSCH. [*With one of his expressive shrugs*] If you lose South Africa, we get what we want from the Boers; they will 'ave more than they want themselves; anyway, your 'ands are full for a long time. In both case we stand in velvet, as you call it.

BASTAPLE. Well, Baron, I think you're riding before the hounds, as we say; but I'm obliged to you. Keep me well informed about Dr. Leyds.

ZIMBOSCH. [*Bowing*] And for our steamers, Mr. Bastaple, you will help our scheme?

BASTAPLE. I see nothing against it at present, Baron; on the contrary.

ZIMBOSCH. *Bien!* We shall bring you the figures, then.

BASTAPLE. Cigar? [*Rings the bell.*

ZIMBOSCH. Divinos! Ah! So excellent! [*Taking and lighting it*] Good-evening, Mr. Bastaple. Good evening! [*He is ushered out by* FARRELL.

BASTAPLE. [*Brooding in his chair*] The beggar's right. [*He rings the bell again.*

[FARRELL *enters.*

Farrell, take down this letter to Mr. Beton.

[*Dictating.*

"Dear Mr. Beton,

"Thinking things over, I conceive despatch of the utmost importance. The less time, the less chance of a slip. Please advance your General Meeting of South African Concessions to early June at latest; and impress on Strood that we *must* have something to go on before the end of May. I hope he is a man who reads between the lines—something adequate, no matter whose toes are trodden on.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Beton,

"Yours faithfully."

[FARRELL *has taken it down in shorthand.*

BASTAPLE. Farrell, *if necessary* buy shares in all the Companies of South African Concessions sufficient to keep prices steady till the General Meeting in June.

FARRELL. My limit, sir?

BASTAPLE. You may raise my holding to half a million shares—not in my name.

FARRELL. No, sir. As to Press enquiries?

BASTAPLE. Discourage pessimism and all rumours of serious trouble with the Boers.

FARRELL. [*With his quick look up*] Very good, sir.

He is going away when BASTAPLE *turns in his chair and speaks sharply.*

BASTAPLE. Farrell!

FARRELL. Sir?

BASTAPLE. What's the general impression of me in the City? After twenty-five years you ought to know.

FARRELL. [*Deprecating*] Well, sir——

[*His eyes in play.*

BASTAPLE. Am I a mystery man?

FARRELL. [*Relieved*] Oh! very much so, sir.

BASTAPLE. In what way?

FARRELL. [*Deprecating*] Well, speculation about your beginnings, sir; curiosity as to your—er—general game. Some think——

BASTAPLE. Yes, Farrell?

FARRELL. Think you're after political power, sir; others that you aim at a peerage. I have heard, sir, that you were a—a Jew and want to buy the Holy Land. But then, I've heard too that you've got a Christian grudge against Rothschilds, and the object of your life is to give them a big knock.

BASTAPLE *is listening with a smile, and seeing this smile,* FARRELL *is beginning to enjoy himself.*

Beehive for rumour, sir, the City.

BASTAPLE. What else?

FARRELL. I've heard you called a great man, sir; and I've heard you called—er——

BASTAPLE. Yes?

FARRELL. A great scoundrel, if you don't mind, sir. Mr. Tregay, for instance—named this the lion's den. [*Without animus*] He didn't call me the jackal, but he wanted to.

BASTAPLE. That reminds me, Tregay mustn't go out.

FARRELL. No, sir? Stop him with——?

BASTAPLE. A club, if you can't think of anything softer.

FARRELL. [*With a snigger*] Would a cable from Mombasa—saying he'd be too late?

BASTAPLE. If you can get it.

FARRELL. Oh! I can get it, sir.

BASTAPLE. Good! What else about me?

FARRELL. Well, sir, a whole lot say you're just a gambler on a huge scale. And there's one man got the fixed idea you've a passion for philanthropy. Everything with a bit of romance to it goes in the city of London.

BASTAPLE. And what do *you* think, Farrell?

FARRELL. [*With his look up*] Well, sir—I never think about the—origin of species.

BASTAPLE. Oh! yes, you do. Come along!

FARRELL. [*Taking hold of himself*] Perhaps you wouldn't like, sir——

BASTAPLE. Risk that.

FARRELL. I don't take the romantic view. No,

sir. Great gifts, great energy—trained in a hard school, whatever it was.

[*He stops with his quick look up.*

BASTAPLE. Go on, Farrell.

FARRELL. I don't believe you have an object, sir, nor a passion. It's—it's—you couldn't stop yourself—that's all about it. Beg your pardon, sir—it's only a private view; I never mention it.

BASTAPLE. Romance useful, eh?

FARRELL. Of course, I've always admired your coolness and resource, and your never being turned by any little—er——

BASTAPLE. Yes, Farrell?

FARRELL. [*Drying up*] I'm sure, sir, I had no intention of giving an opinion. [*Edging towards the door.*

BASTAPLE. Come here!

FARRELL *comes to the table and* BASTAPLE *looks up into his face.*

For a quarter of a century you've deserved my confidence, so far as I know. I hope you always will.

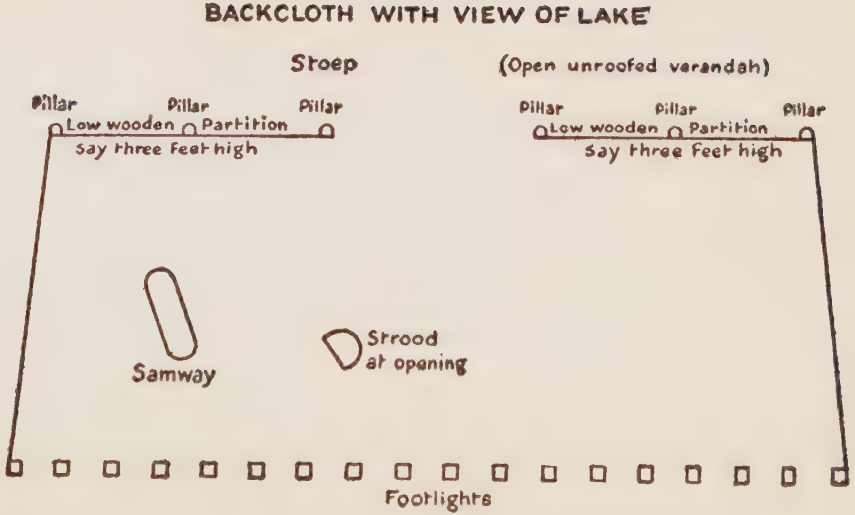
FARRELL. You're very good, sir; I'm sure I want to —I feel——

BASTAPLE. [*Staring at him a moment*] Thank you, Farrell. Send off this cable to Mombasa. [*He hands the cable to* FARRELL] And give me the map of Africa.

[FARRELL *is getting the atlas as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II


BACKCLOTH WITH VIEW OF LAKE
Stoep
(Open unroofed verandah)
Pillar
Pillar
Pillar
Low wooden
Partition
Say three feet high
Pillar
Pillar
Pillar
Low wooden
Partition
Say three feet high
Samway
Strood
at opening
Footlights

ACT II

SCENE I

The scene is the shack of SAMWAY, *the elephant-hunter, on the south shore of the Albert Edward Nyanza. A room divided only by a low wooden partition from a stoep, or low, roofless verandah, seen through the opening at back.*

In long chairs, with drinks and pipes, STROOD *and* SAMWAY *are seated;* STROOD *has a map on his lap,* SAMWAY'S *left leg is bandaged.*

SAMWAY. [*Lean, brown, bearded*] Well, Mr. Strood, you sure did hustle. No man could have come through from the coast quicker.

STROOD. From Beton's cables, Samway, what they're really after is trouble with the Belgians. [*Putting his finger on the map*] They want that Katanga region coloured red, and so do I.

SAMWAY. All one to me what darned flag flies.

STROOD. The slave trade's a stale pretext.

SAMWAY. [*After a shrewd glance, holding up a little leather bag which he has taken out of his pocket*] If you want to stir mud—see this!

STROOD *stares at him.* SAMWAY *tosses the bag to him, and he undoes it and stares at the contents.*

SAMWAY. Yes, sir—diamonds; not very large, but plenty where those come from. Fetch me over that map.

STROOD rises, spreads it on SAMWAY'S *knee, and stands behind him, ready to follow* SAMWAY'S *finger.*

Down here [*putting his finger on the map*] between the Kasai river and the Luembe, there's diamonds—all over that country—and no one knows of them but me and one Belgian. Last I heard of that fellow, he was gettin' busy at Basoko with an expedition to go south. He's after them diamonds. Now, get there first, make a discoverer's claim, and keep some founders' shares for me. How's that for making trouble?

He looks quizzically up at STROOD, *who has raised himself and is staring before him—a face brown and sanguine, a jaw of iron.*

STROOD. [*Shaking his head*] Clean away from instructions, Samway.

SAMWAY. Nothing like diamonds to raise brotherly love. It'd make all the fuss they want sure enough.

STROOD. H'm! [*Looking at* SAMWAY'S *leg*] Why did you go and get your leg chawed up like that?

SAMWAY. [*Pointing to a lion skin*] Ask that guy there.

STROOD. Anyone here who knows that country besides you?

SAMWAY. Not a mother's son.

STROOD. Nyangwe on the Lualaba was my limit. How many weeks from there?

SAMWAY. [*Tracing on map*] Say 350 miles as the crow flies—and I guess the darned fowl flies straighter in Africa than anywhere else; six to seven hundred miles of marching; through Batetela country, too.

STROOD. Mine's too small a caravan for that!

SAMWAY. Yeh! Those Batetela are a worse set of varmints than the Manyema—by golly, they are! They got the poison trick bad. When they hit you you sure die. An' they eat you after.

STROOD. How did *you* get through them, then?

SAMWAY. We—ell! Friend of mine has almighty power in those parts—son of one of those old Zanzibar slavers that the Belgians chawed up in '92; does a bit on his own still.

STROOD. Have you a pull on him?

SAMWAY. Why, yes—this Samehda was in trouble with a lion when we was huntin' there; I took care of the lion, so we kind of made blood-brotherhood. Brought his sister, too, back up here with me, to get her eyes cured—nearly blind, she was—quite a local beauty; she's livin' with Herrick now.

STROOD. What! That naturalist?

SAMWAY. Yeh. Devoted to him; spaniels round him all the time. Strikin' figure, Herrick.

STROOD. Unsociable devil.

SAMWAY. He certainly has mighty little use for anyone, s'long as he can watch his monkeys. [*An idea strikes him.*] See here, Mr. Strood!

STROOD. Well?

SAMWAY. Between the Lualaba and Lake Tanganyika there's a brand of chimpanzee that Herrick's just got to chum with, to finish his book on the Central African monkey. Take him and his girl along; she'll fix her brother for you.

STROOD. On a trip like mine?

SAMWAY. Hard bit o' goods; go all day, and all night too.

STROOD. [*Shaking his head*] Women!

SAMWAY. You won't get hold of Samehda without her. And that belt between the Lualaba river and the Lomami river is the darnedest bit of country God ever spat out—forest and marsh and Batetela cannibals savage as hell.

STROOD. [*Taking another turn or two*] Time, Samway—time! I've got to send them news before the end of May.

SAMWAY. Reach Samehda, and you'll have plenty news of slavery. Kill two birds with one stone, there.

STROOD. Would Herrick go?

SAMWAY. Crazy to meet that chimpanzee.

STROOD. [*Suddenly*] Could you get him here?

SAMWAY, Sure.

STROOD *strikes his hands together, and* SADIG, *his Berberine servant, appears from the verandah.*

SAMWAY. Go to Mr. Herrick. Samway wants palaver say.

[*Sadig goes.*

Mind! If you let on where you're going, you'll

lose your carriers. They're scared to death of them Batetela.

STROOD. [*Nodding*] How long can I reckon on—before that Belgian?

SAMWAY. Why! He'll be all of five months by the road he'll go.

STROOD. By the Lord, Samway, I'll have a try!

SAMWAY. That's great! But pack your halo; you'll have to drive your crowd.

STROOD. Mustn't I tell my white men?

SAMWAY. Not safe. Let 'em think there's nothing beyond your original plan—to hunt up what's left of the slave trade. When are you scheduled to start?

STROOD. Day after to-morrow.

SAMWAY. Well! Forced marches play the devil. I don't hold with beatin' niggers, but take a sjambok; you'll need it.

STROOD. [*Smiling*] This isn't a land for the chicken-livered, Samway.

SAMWAY. Well, there's been travellers here who never raised a hand, but I judge they didn't live long.

STROOD. Where does Herrick hail from?

SAMWAY. New Zealand. Independent as a jack rabbit.

STROOD. Bad man to take, Samway. An expedition like this has to be all of a piece, in the leader's hand.

SAMWAY. Well, it's the girl or nothing; and she won't go without him.

A tall man, lean and dark, with a good deal of hair, a pointed beard and deep, remarkable eyes, has come on to the stoep.

SAMWAY. Evening, Mr. Herrick!

HERRICK. [*Advancing*] Evening to you. How's the leg?

SAMWAY. It kind of feels complimented when you call it that. Know Mr. Strood?

HERRICK. [*With a slight bow*] Yes.

STROOD. Good-evening.

SAMWAY. Mr. Herrick, we was talkin' about that chimpanzee the other evenin'.

HERRICK. Marungensis variety. Well?

SAMWAY. Mr. Strood is goin' into the home of that gentleman. Thought maybe you'd like to ask him to get you a specimen. Your girl comes from there. You don't talk to her about critters, I guess, or she might 'a' told you.

HERRICK. I want to see the fellow living, Samway.

STROOD. Like to come with us, Mr. Herrick?

HERRICK. What? [*Surprised*] How long are you to be away?

STROOD. Seven months or so with luck.

SAMWAY. Take your girl; she'll be useful there, I tell you.

HERRICK. Amina? No.

SAMWAY. [*Quizzically*] You won't be two days out before she'll be with you. That's the worst of these half-Arab girls. Never let 'em get fond of you or they'll follow you like a dog.

HERRICK. Could I leave her with you, Samway?

SAMWAY. [*With a secret glance at* STROOD] What'll *she* say to that? Call her in. I judge she'll be around.

HERRICK. Amina!

Instantly the GIRL *walks in from the stoep. A fine figure, veiled, not very dark in colour, with black eyes fixed on* HERRICK, *quite ignoring the other men.*

AMINA. [*She stands just inside the room with her eyes on* HERRICK] You want me?

HERRICK. Listen. I go a journey—six months I leave you with Mr. Samway.

AMINA. [*After a moment's silence*] No—no! I come.

SAMWAY. [*Grinning*] What! Amina! Won't you stay with me?

AMINA. No. Go with Herrick.

[*She crosses swiftly and puts his hand to her forehead.*

SAMWAY. See that, Mr. Strood? You'll have to take her, I reckon.

AMINA. [*With a swift look at the two men, and some instinctive comprehension*] Ya, Mist' Strood, take me with Herrick; I know forest. Good traveller, Mist' Samway—not?

SAMWAY. Sure, you are!

HERRICK. Amina, go home. I come directly. Hear me?

AMINA. I cook for you—know good water—make bandage—mend your clo'es—keep watch.

SAMWAY. Why not, Mr. Herrick? She's good on the road; she won't trouble you any.

HERRICK. [*Revolted at the thought of being the only man with a woman in all that crowd*] No. If she won't stay, I give up the idea. Good-night!

He turns from the GIRL *and goes out on to the stoep and away.*

SAMWAY. [*Sharply*] Amina!

[AMINA, *who is following* HERRICK, *stops.*

Here!

AMINA. [*Going to* SAMWAY] Herrick angry.

SAMWAY. See here, my girl! Listen! Mr. Strood wants Herrick to go with him; understand?

[AMINA *looks at* STROOD, *who nods.*

And *I* want to send salaam to your brother. Understand? Now, you do what I tell you. You let Herrick go; you stay, be good girl, obedient—let him go.

[AMINA *makes a movement of refusal.*

Listen! I send you after him one day behind; you follow; you catch him in five days, not before; too far to send you back. Then he take you with him—see? Herrick's going after a monkey; he wants that monkey good. If he's got to stay here because of you, he'll certainly get mad with you. See?

AMINA. [*Looking deeply at him*] You—true?

SAMWAY. Sure!

AMINA. [*With a suspicious look at* STROOD] Why *he* want take Herrick?

SAMWAY. [*After a look at* STROOD; *to* AMINA] Herrick

write all about Mr. Strood—make much noise in white man's country; good for Herrick, good for Mr. Strood.

AMINA. [*To* STROOD] Why you not like Herrick?

STROOD. [*Taken aback*] I?

SAMWAY. You don't understand white men yet, Amina; they're not like Arabs. Mr. Strood and Herrick not friends and not enemies—all business. Now, will you do what I say or not?

AMINA. I go home. If Herrick angry at me, then I do what you say—stay behind—come to you, you send me follow. [*She touches her heart*] You friend to me, Mist' Samway. My brother love you good. So?

SAMWAY. So—it is.

She makes a gesture of salute to the two men and goes out.

SAMWAY. That's fixed it. He'll sure be riled, thinkin' of his chimpanzee. His mouth's waterin' after that critter. Cute, ain't she? These half-caste Arabs are deep. Simple, too. You may bet on—their gratitude; and you may bet on—their revenge.

STROOD. Not much nigger in that girl?

SAMWAY. Half Manyema. Their women are mighty handsome, and light-coloured. The father was pretty pure Arab.

From the stoep appears the white-clothed figure of a youngish, brown-skinned MAN.

STROOD. Well, Sadig?

SADIG. Cap'en Lockyer, Docker Franks, Missah Collie here, sah.

STROOD. Mind if I see them, Samway?

SAMWAY. Sure, no. Bring them right in.

LOCKYER, FRANKS, *and* COLLIE *enter from the stoep.* LOCKYER *is in tropical cloth;* FRANKS *and* COLLIE *in Holland drill.* LOCKYER *is soldierly, dry, and brown, with a small, fairish moustache and refined features.* FRANKS *is dark-haired and sallow-faced.* COLLIE, *a biggish man, has a good deal of roughish hair and moustache and rugged features. They greet* SAMWAY.

STROOD. Well, gentlemen, all ready? How are your men's feet, Captain Lockyer?

LOCKYER. None too sound, sir. I'd rather have had Bangalas. The Soudanese are bad stragglers, as Barttelot found.

STROOD. Can't make a soldier out of a Bangala under three months. How's your prospector's kit, Collie?

COLLIE. Ah've known worse, and—ah've known better.

STROOD. Well, if you never commit yourself beyond that, you won't disgrace the north of the Tweed. Through with the vaccinations, Doctor? [FRANKS *nods*] Got any of Parke's antidote for poisoned arrows?

FRANKS. Can't get it.

STROOD. Well, take plenty of ammonium car-

bonate. We start 4 a.m. sharp, day after to-morrow. I'm going to make long marches till we get to forest. See you keep 'em up to it. Got all the quinine you want, Dr. Franks? [FRANKS *nods*] Right! Look after your men's feet, Lockyer. I want to get to Manyema country quick. It's there we'll begin to find any slaving that's left. Anything to ask friend Samway?

LOCKYER. Are the Manyema active, Samway?

SAMWAY. Why! they take a Bank Holiday now and then, Captain. Don't let your men stray, or they'll end in the frying-pan.

FRANKS. [*To* STROOD] Are we going further south or west than Nyangwe?

STROOD. [*After exchanging a look with* SAMWAY] I don't know, Franks. The Belgians won't love us, so where exactly the job will take us, I can't tell. It's a roving commission.

[*He looks from one to another.*

LOCKYER. That's all right, sir.

[*The others nod.*

STROOD. Mr. Herrick may come with us, in search of a new sort of chimpanzee.

COLLIE. Losh! Aren't there enough monkeys in the world a'ready?

SAMWAY. We—ell! I judge we all want ancestors.

COLLIE. Aye! That's a morbid curiosity.

LOCKYER. I'd give all mine to know what's won the Leger.

STROOD. Well, gentlemen, stout hearts, prepared for anything, I hope.

COLLIE. I got a christenin' bottle here, Chief.

Produces a champagne bottle from his pocket and a corkscrew.

SAMWAY. [*To* SADIG, *who is standing at the back*] Glasses, boy!

SADIG. Missa Herrick come back, sah.

He takes the bottle and goes to fetch the glasses.

HERRICK *comes in, with the* GIRL *following.*

HERRICK. [*Looking round*] Evening to you!

SAMWAY. Thought it over, Mr. Herrick?

HERRICK. [*To* STROOD] If you really meant it, I'll come, and thanks for the chance.

STROOD. Glad to have you.

HERRICK. [*To* SAMWAY] She'll stay with you, Samway; if you'll be kind enough to look after her.

SAMWAY. [*Looking at* AMINA] Sure thing.

STROOD. One word, Mr. Herrick. You understand, of course, that you'll be under my orders, like these gentlemen. In this sort of trip the leader has to be an autocrat. It's queer country.

HERRICK *bows. The* GIRL, *standing with her arm raised, half hiding her face, looks intently at* STROOD. *The glasses have been brought, and handed round.*

SAMWAY. [*Raising his glass*] Gentlemen—safe return! Luck to you all!

STROOD. Samway—success! [*He drains his glass. The* GIRL *stands unmoving, looking from* STROOD *to* HERRICK.

Having emptied their glasses, FRANKS, LOCKYER, *and* COLLIE *go out on to the stoep.*

STROOD. [*Following*] A moment, Doctor.

He joins them on the stoep, and they pass away, talking. The GIRL *remains motionless, watching* HERRICK *and listening.*

HERRICK. [*Approaching* SAMWAY] Samway! Why don't I cotton to Strood?

SAMWAY. Strood and me have been in one or two mix-ups together, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK. You know him all the better, then. Well?

SAMWAY. [*Smiling*] I judge Strood makes Gawd in his own image. Maybe that's the reason.

HERRICK. Sticks at nothing, you mean?

SAMWAY. You've gotten a habit of plain words. Well, he gets things done, whether in London City or an African forest.

HERRICK. I see.

SAMWAY. Old Man Allah 'll need a full flush to knock Strood out; he couldn't die to save his life.

HERRICK. Thanks. [*Lowering his voice*] The girl will be all right with you?

SAMWAY. So she don't run away. Can't lock her up.

HERRICK. If she can't have *me,* she won't leave *you.* Good-night!

He shakes SAMWAY'S *hand, and, beckoning to* AMINA, *goes out. The* GIRL *comes swiftly down to* SAMWAY.

SAMWAY. Well, Amina?

AMINA. You swear by Allah—I follow Herrick?

SAMWAY. By Allah!

AMINA. You friend to me—friend to my brother.

She leans forward, takes his hand and puts it to her forehead.

SAMWAY. That's right, Amina.

AMINA. I trust.

She rises and goes swiftly out to follow HERRICK, *just as* STROOD *comes in. He passes her with a stare, and she puts up her arm to cover her face. He stops, and stands looking at her.*

STROOD. Girl—understand! You obey me just as if you were a man.

AMINA. [*Keeping her arm up*] Obey Herrick.

STROOD. That's just what you don't do, it seems.

AMINA. Obey Herrick when I with him.

STROOD. And no tricks with any other man.

AMINA. [*Dropping her arm. Proudly*] Trick! I no play trick.

STROOD. All right! Remember!

AMINA. [*With a flash of eyes and teeth*] Yes. I remember.

He passes her. She stands looking intently back at him over her shoulder; then goes out.

SAMWAY. Queer critter, that girl. Knife you as soon as look. Don't get wrong with her.

STROOD. So long as she behaves; but she'll have

to toe the line like all the rest. What do you think of my crowd, Samway? Collie's a rough diamond; Franks knows his job. What about young Lockyer?

SAMWAY. English gentleman, I judge.

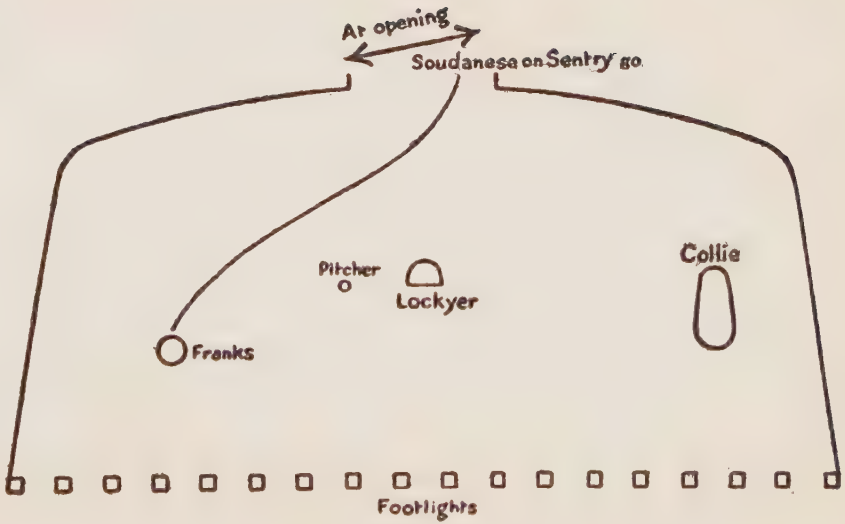
STROOD. That against him?

SAMWAY. Well, too many points of honour are liable to get him eaten in a country like that.

STROOD. [*With a laugh*] Now, Samway, write me that letter to the girl's brother; and tell me every last bit you know about the route—I'm going to get there.

He spreads the map, and they pore over it as

THE CURTAIN FALLS.


At opening
Soudanese on Sentry go
Pitcher
Lockyer
Collie
Franks
Footlights

SCENE II

Eight weeks later, on the west bank of the Lualaba river. Noon. A large native hut of the better type. Over an opening in the centre of the back wall some matting has been lifted, revealing trodden mud, undergrowth, high trees, and glimpses of river. The hut is of saplings and large leaves of the amoma tree, plastered inside with dried mud; it has conical roofing. There is nothing in the hut save white man's kit and messtins dumped here and there.

COLLIE, *wrapped in a blanket, lies asleep on the Left. He is recovering from a bout of fever. Centre,* LOCKYER, *with the remnants of soldierly neatness, in shirt and breeches, sits cross-legged on the ground writing up his log. A native pitcher stands on the floor close to him. Some clothes are stretched here and there to dry. A Soudanese* SENTRY, *with rifle, at long intervals crosses and recrosses the opening. Through the opening* FRANKS *enters. He has a growth of dark beard and is thin, stained, and haggard. He comes forward, takes up the pitcher and raises it to drink.*

LOCKYER. Steady on, Franks. It's not been boiled. Here!

[*He hands his water-bottle to* FRANKS, *who drinks.*

FRANKS. Your Soudanee is food for the crocodiles, Lockyer.

LOCKYER. Poor devil!

FRANKS. Ammonium carbonate hardly touches this brand of poison. The two carriers will die too —tetanus supervening.

He leans against the wall, Right, in an exhausted attitude, looking down at LOCKYER.

LOCKYER. How's the chief's fever?

FRANKS. Passed off. Strong as a bull. Now he's on his legs we shall be off again.

LOCKYER. Got fever yourself, haven't you?

[FRANKS *nods.*

Collie's temp.'s down. [*Shutting up his log*] Look here, old man, I'll go on guard. Lie down; if we're off again, you'll need a spell.

FRANKS. [*Fever mounting in him*] Lockyer, why have we crossed the Lualaba? Our job was to lie between this river and the Lakes. Eight hellish weeks getting here, and nothing done! No attempt to find slave trade—no trace of it. Driving—driving these poor wretches on. Six dead. Two more will die. Eight can't carry—can't march even—have to be left here; at least six more will founder when we start again. All forest in front. Forest again—my God! [*His voice has risen;* COLLIE *wakes and sits up*] What's Strood doing? Damn him!

LOCKYER. Steady, old son!

COLLIE. Physician, heal thaself! [*Rising*] Eh! but I'm feelin' fine again. Lie down, Franks; ye've no constitution. I told ye to get out of your wet togs last night.

FRANKS. With three men dying on my hands, and the chief cursing at every man we lose! He's playing some game we know nothing of. I've felt it all along. We can't go on like this; the men are skeletons. We *must* rest and feed them up.

COLLIE. If we rest, it's not ourselves we'll be feedin' up. Drums all night. We'll be attacked again directly.

LOCKYER. We gave them a pill yesterday, crossing the river.

COLLIE. Aye, but they're forgetfu' loons in this forest. [*As* FRANKS *crosses to the blankets*] I'm with the doctor; we want a reason for goin' on the way we are.

FRANKS. They can spare their arrows; we'll all founder in a fortnight, driven on like this. These stinking swamps!

He is seized with a violent fit of shivering. COLLIE *wraps him in a blanket, and almost forces him down against the wall, Left.*

The Soudanese SENTRY *stands to attention in the opening and speaks.*

SENTRY. Chief—come! Captain!

[*He grunts and is silent, at attention.*

STROOD *enters. The* SENTRY *moves on.* STROOD, *though lined and sallowed,*

has not lost, like the others, his look of physical strength. He has a revolver in his belt and a cloud on his face.

STROOD. Gentlemen—no officer on guard! Do you happen to remember we were attacked in crossing yesterday? Whose duty?

LOCKYER. I was just going, sir.

STROOD. "Just going" doesn't do, Captain Lockyer. Where's Herrick? Let *him* take his turn.

LOCKYER. We wanted to ask you, sir——

STROOD. [*Ominously*] Well?

LOCKYER. Why have we crossed the Lualaba? We understood——

STROOD. Thought you were a soldier.

LOCKYER. [*Steadily*] We consider the position pretty desperate, sir. We signed for an expedition between the Lakes and the Lualaba.

STROOD. You signed to be under my leadership for seven months. You have five months to run, Captain Lockyer, and your reputation in the Army at stake.

LOCKYER. I know that, sir. But you've crossed into cannibal country and the men are scared. We may have wholesale desertions.

STROOD. I've only flogged for desertion so far; I'll shoot the next man who tries it on. [*Grimly*] But there'll be no straggling between this river and the Lomami. Any straggler now is food for cannibals.

FRANKS. And if we *all* recross the river?

STROOD. [*Putting his hand on his revolver*] Dr. Franks!

LOCKYER. [*Quietly*] Franks has fever, sir. But we shall be grateful if you'll tell us the exact purpose for which the whole expedition is risking its life.

COLLIE. Aye, chief; is it a pure pleasure trip?

STROOD. [*Controlling himself*] Gentlemen, I've had to be on the safe side and keep my counsel, or lose my carriers. Well, we're on the safe side now. Our real destination is south, in the Lualaba Kasai.

[*Sensation.*

COLLIE. How's that?

STROOD. Diamonds. No one else knows of them but one Belgian. And we're racing his outfit from Basoko.

[FRANKS *laughs.*

COLLIE. Diamonds! Losh!

LOCKYER. We're not after the slave trade, then?

STROOD. Certainly. I'm expecting news of it hereabouts. But this other object is just as important.

LOCKYER. Frankly, sir, if I'd known this was a commercial expedition, I shouldn't have come.

STROOD. Commercial! You've heard of the copper deposits in Katanga? The south-east of the Congo State is a mass of minerals, gentlemen. It should never have been let slip. Samway's shown me the

diamonds he found further west. If we can make a discoverer's claim, it should lead to an alteration of the whole frontier, and add one of the richest bits of Africa to the British flag. Is that commercial, Lockyer?

LOCKYER. [*Steadily*] How do you mean, sir? A frontier once fixed——

STROOD. Frontiers are never fixed.

LOCKYER. If it's for the flag——

COLLIE. It's a bonnie idea.

STROOD. Worth a few lives and a few scruples!

FRANKS. Only twenty-six carriers can march at all—and six of *them* will founder in a day or two. Eight men can't march, and two are dying. What are you going to do with them?

STROOD. Put them and you, Dr. Franks, and Mr. Herrick, back across the river to camp until you're fit; then you will take them home the way we came, or to Tanganyika, as you find best. I hope to send news by you of the slave trade.

FRANKS. Slave trade! It's we're the slavers—driving on these men——

[*He laughs a disordered laugh.*

LOCKYER. Franks! . . . With only nine Soudanese, sir, and less than thirty carriers—all in bad shape; it's precious long odds against our getting through. We shall be attacked all the way.

STROOD. Why do you think I brought that girl of Herrick's?

LOCKYER. Yes, sir, why? She's a sullen little snake.

STROOD. Because she's sister to an Arab friend of Samway's, who rules these parts. From him—we shall get safe conduct to the Lomami, and more carriers if we need them.

LOCKYER. I see. That sounds good enough.

STROOD. Enough said, Lockyer. [*He holds out his hand, which* LOCKYER *takes*] Put Herrick on guard. I'm going to send the girl off now, with Samway's letter.

He looks grimly at FRANKS, *huddled in his blanket against the wall, and goes out.*

LOCKYER *takes belt, revolver, and stick, buckles on the belt, and stands looking at* FRANKS.

LOCKYER. Get a sleep, old chap.

He goes out, speaking to the SENTRY *in the entrance.* COLLIE *begins attending to the gear in the hut.*

FRANKS. [*Huddled on the floor, with knees drawn up*] Good fellow, Lockyer, but a fool, Collie. The Empire's built with the bones of fools like Lockyer.

COLLIE. [*Close to him*] Na, no! The Empire's built by men that's got an itch to measure theirsels against the impossible. Strood's a great man in his way.

FRANKS. Lockyer's worth ten of him.

COLLIE. Doctor, ye're no' just. There's not a square mile of civilised airth that hasn't had a Strood at work on it. But for your Stroods we'd all be savages. England was forest no' so verra long ago.

FRANKS. [*In the tone of one who utters an unimaginable word*] England!

COLLIE. [*Who is bending down*] Doctor, I'm eaten up wi' critters; the hut I slept in last night was fair crawlin' wi' 'em. [*He contemplates his stringy legs.*

FRANKS. [*Suddenly*] Driving on these poor devils —the skeletons we've made of them?

COLLIE. [*Humouring*] Well, ye can nurse 'em back home.

FRANKS. They'll never see home; the forest'll have their bones, and he knows it.

COLLIE. Aweel! [*Stretching*] Ah'd give ma conscience for the smell of whisky.

HERRICK *appears in the opening. He comes forward, impressively gaunt.*

HERRICK. Got the map?

COLLIE. Lockyer's told ye, then?

HERRICK. [*Nodding*] Cat's paws. [*Looking at the map*] Franks! We'll make for the Bambara Hills and Tanganyika when your men can march. Fever?

FRANKS *nods. He is now shivering violently.*

HERRICK. Pain? Across the back? Like an injection? [*He takes a little case from* FRANKS'S *pocket and prepares to inject*] Collie, yesterday, crossing the river, I caught a frog with unwebbed toes. He's got long, sharp claws. Now, doctor——

[*He injects.*

COLLIE. Grand stuff, opium! [*Pointing on the*

map] Losh! Those diamonds are a way off! Heard about your girl?

HERRICK. I have.

COLLIE. Will she go, d'ye think? She's no' friendly to Strood. Ma God, the way she looks at him! Aye, but it's a misfortune ye don't get on with Strood. There's a ween o' plans go wrong because o' personalities.

HERRICK. He's a bully.

COLLIE. [*Angrily*] Ah! you and the doctor! How would *you* get a caravan across this country? Ye'd never get beyond your front door.

HERRICK. [*To* FRANKS] Any easier?

FRANKS *nods. He is getting drowsy from the injection.*

COLLIE. Ye can't eat pie without cuttin' crust. It's the lives of niggers against the glories of trade and science. I'm thinkin' ye'd be best to go and sit down by the Round Pond, Herrick, and study the chimpanzee in Kensington Gardens—What's the trouble now?

[*Sounds of commotion without.*

Another of your men dead, doctor?

FRANKS *half raises himself, but droops again somnolently. The sounds of commotion increase.*

COLLIE. Aye, well! It's no' a God-fearin' parish this. [*He reaches for his revolver.*

HERRICK *steps towards the door, but stands aside to let* STROOD *pass in. He has a sjambok in his hands and looks furious.*

The Soudanese SENTRY *blocks the entry after him.*

STROOD. [*Halting at sight of* HERRICK] Do you know anything of this?

HERRICK. [*Haughtily*] Of *what*?

STROOD. Did you put your girl up to sneaking into my tent?

HERRICK. Don't treat me like your black men, Mr. Strood.

LOCKYER'S VOICE. Into the hut!

Four ragged Soudanese SOLDIERS *enter with the girl* AMINA *between them.* LOCKYER *follows. By his direction they open out, and, leaving the* GIRL *between* STROOD *and* HERRICK, *block the entrance. The* GIRL *stands quite still, but her eyes move and glitter dangerously.* STROOD *has recovered his self-command.*

STROOD. Lockyer—Collie—the letter from Samway to this girl's brother is missing from my tent since I was here a few minutes ago. Sadig there? Call him!

LOCKYER *looks out through the opening and beckons.* SADIG, STROOD'S *Berberine servant, enters. The* GIRL *turns her eyes on him malevolently.*

STROOD. Sadig, you saw this girl come out of my tent just now?

SADIG. Yes, sah.

AMINA. Not true; you no see me come out!

SADIG. [*With a gesture of solemn affirmation*] Sah—that true. I see her come out.

STROOD. With something in her hand?

SADIG. Yes, sah; white thing.

STROOD. A letter?

SADIG. Sah—too far away. Can't say.

AMINA. You no see me.

STROOD. Quiet, you! How did she look—like a thief?

SADIG. Sah—she look this way, that way—[*he mimics what he has seen*] then see me, and run for Missah Herrick's tent. I follow. Missah Herrick—he not there. This girl stand and look at me and curse. I ask her what she do in my master's tent. She say she not do noting there, she say. Sah, I see her coming out. She bad—she steal something.

STROOD. What did you do then?

SADIG. Keep watch on her, an' call out big. Captain Lockyer he come and take her with these boys and send me fetch you, sah.

STROOD. What did she do while you were watching her?

SADIG. Spit at me—call me dog—she bad woman.

STROOD. Did she try and hide anything? Move her hands?

SADIG. She make her hands like this. [*He mimics hands on hips*] She is not a good one.

STROOD. [*To* HERRICK] Did you know of this letter?

HERRICK. Lockyer told me of it just now.

STROOD. Where?

HERRICK. In my tent.

STROOD. Was the girl present?

HERRICK. Yes.

STROOD. Lockyer, go with Sadig; search Mr. Herrick's tent thoroughly and come back quick.

[LOCKYER *and* SADIG *go out.*

HERRICK. By what right?

STROOD. Self-preservation. If the letter is not found in your tent, it is on this girl.

HERRICK. [*To the* GIRL, *sternly*] Did you steal this letter?

AMINA. [*With a spaniel's look*] I no steal. Arab girl not steal. Why I steal letter? No good for me.

HERRICK. What made you go into Mr. Strood's tent?

AMINA. I no go—stand outside.

HERRICK. Why?

AMINA. I go look in—see whether he got better tent than Herrick.

STROOD. Mr. Collie, go and search between my tent and Mr. Herrick's. Look well to both sides of a bee-line between.

[COLLIE *goes out.*

HERRICK. Whatever she's done, you'll treat her gently, please.

STROOD. The life of the expedition hangs on this letter. And by God, I'll have it, if I have to flay her alive. It's the life of one tricky baggage against all our lives.

HERRICK. You've been making cat's paws of us.

But as he speaks, LOCKYER, SADIG, *and* COLLIE *appear in the entrance.*

STROOD. Well, Captain Lockyer?

LOCKYER. Not there, sir.

STROOD. Collie!

COLLIE. Not a sign.

STROOD. [*Taking a step forward with the sjambok raised; to the* GIRL] Now! Give me that letter. Quick!

The GIRL *stands cowering, her eyes alive with hate. She gives a quick look of supplication at* HERRICK, *who takes a step towards her.*

STROOD. Surround her.

[*The* SOUDANESE *surround her.* Stand still, Mr. Herrick. [*To the* GIRL] Will you give me that letter?

AMINA. I no got letter.

STROOD. Search her!

HERRICK. Stop that! Leave her to me!

Two SOUDANESE *bar him off with rifles; two seize the* GIRL. *A moment's pause.*

STROOD. Strip her!

LOCKYER. [*Suddenly*] Halt! [*The* SOUDANESE *are still*] Sorry, sir. Can't do that.

STROOD. [*Furiously*] Captain Lockyer—no damned squeamishness! It's your life and mine, and every man's here.

LOCKYER. Keep her in custody, sir; she'll give up the letter presently.

AMINA. [*With a proud and triumphant gesture*] I no got letter. I eat it!

STROOD *lashes at her, but the blow is intercepted by* LOCKYER'S *cane, and only falls lightly.*

AMINA. I kill you—one day.

STROOD. [*Recovering his self-possession in the strange way peculiar to him*] Very well! Captain Lockyer, raise camp. We march in an hour. Tell off three of your men to guard this girl, on pain of a flogging if they let her get away. She will go with us, and be shot if we're attacked. Sadig, bring me the two natives we took yesterday, and stand by to interpret. I'll tell them we've got Samehda's sister, and release them to spread the news of it.

[SADIG *goes out.*

COLLIE. Chief, have we a chance, now, to get through at all?

STROOD. I don't know; but we're going to try, Collie. Raise camp.

COLLIE *shrugs his shoulders, gathers up the two collected kits of himself and* LOCKYER, *and goes out.*

STROOD. Captain Lockyer, bind her fast and take her away. You will leave four of your men here with Dr. Franks, in charge of the ten carriers who can't march.

[LOCKYER *and his* MEN *go out with the* GIRL.

Dr. Franks, you will take the canoe and re-cross the river as soon as you can; you will camp till your men can march; then make your way back to the

Albert Edward, or to Tanganyika, as you find best.

FRANKS, *who has risen, stares at him without reply.*

Herrick, I shall keep your wench till we've crossed the Lomami river. No harm will come to her unless we're attacked. She has brought us to this pass, and she must get us out of it. You object to my ways of conducting a caravan; well, you now have an opportunity of judging how far you can get on without them.

He goes out, detaching the skin covering of the hut and letting it fall over the opening. There is silence, and but a dim light in the hut.

HERRICK. [*Crossing to where he can see* FRANKS] Marooned, Doctor.

[FRANKS *breaks into weak laughter.*

FRANKS. Lopped off—the rotten branches!

He stops with a sharp ejaculation and sinks down on to the blankets.

HERRICK. Here!

He lifts him and prepares to give him another injection.

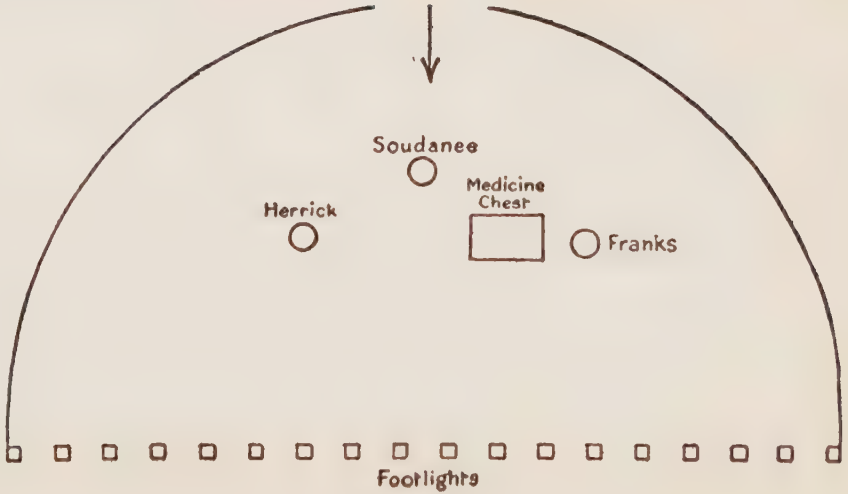
FRANKS. [*Feebly*] Thanks, thanks.

[*His mouth is distorted with pain.*

HERRICK *makes the injection; a faint smile comes on* FRANKS'S *face. He falls back, drowsy.*

FRANKS. The forest!

CURTAIN.


Soudanee
Medicine Chest
Herrick
Franks
Footlights

SCENE III

The curtain has been lowered for a few seconds to indicate the lapse of time.

The scene is the same, three days later. Noon.

The hut is empty of all gear except a medicine chest. The matting over the doorway is gone. FRANKS *is feebly going through contents of chest. The fever has left him, but he looks wan and exhausted.* HERRICK *enters, followed by a* SOUDANEE.

HERRICK. Doctor, quinine for this man.

FRANKS. [*Holding up a bottle*] This is all Strood's left me.

He beckons to the SOUDANEE, *looks at him searchingly, and gives him a dose. The* MAN *salutes and goes out.*

HERRICK. He's the best man we've got. . . . Still they don't attack—three days! Odd!

FRANKS. They must be following Strood up.

HERRICK. Practically no food, Franks. Daren't let them forage. Are you up to crossing?

FRANKS. [*Shrugging*] Must be.

HERRICK. Queer thing, colour. Suppose I shall never see that girl again; find I haven't half the feeling for her I'd have for a dog. Got room in that chest for this bottle? My frog; don't want to lose

him. Quaint chap, isn't he? [*He holds up the bottled specimen for* FRANKS *to see*] The variety of creature—the riot of life and death, in this forest!

FRANKS. Remember the carrier's dying wife in Stanley's book: "It's a bad world, master, and you have lost your way in it." We have. How many journeys in that canoe? Fourteen of us, and the loads?

HERRICK. Four, I should say. I'll just label this chap.

[FRANKS *goes out.*

HERRICK *sits down, tears a sheet from his pocket-book and writes: "Unwebbed frog, with claws. Found on the Lualaba river, Christmas,* '98. *C. Herrick."*

As he is attaching the label, the girl AMINA *comes in; her garments are torn, but her face and body show no great signs of fatigue. She steals round with the swaying movement peculiar to her, and has clasped his knees before he realises that she is there.*

AMINA. Amina come back! Escape—come through forest—back to Herrick.

Again she embraces his knees, and is about to kiss his feet.

HERRICK. [*Rising*] Get up. I don't like you to do that. [*Raising her by the shoulder and stroking it*] Where did you leave them, Amina?

AMINA. Two marches. [*With a smile that shows her white teeth*] They not clever—Amina too clever.

At night—she burn rope—look!

[*She shows a burnt place on her arm.*

HERRICK. God! That must have hurt!

AMINA. Five carrier run away—I find two dead of arrow. Soon all killed now or run away. They not go other marches—many. [*Her eyes and teeth gleam*] Now I guide Herrick home, quick. Amina clever—got letter still.

She steals her hand into the garment round her waist and brings out the letter.

HERRICK. You little snake!

AMINA. [*Proudly*] Save it for Herrick! [*She gives him the letter*] Herrick safe now.

HERRICK. [*Reading the letter; grave and puzzled*] Tell me now—what made you steal this letter?

AMINA. Strood hate Herrick—use letter—then leave Herrick behind, so Batetela kill. Now Batetela kill Strood instead—soon kill.

HERRICK. [*To himself*] Who'd ever understand how their minds work! Jezebel!

The word is Greek to AMINA, *but his gesture disturbs her.*

AMINA. Save Herrick's life. Herrick use letter—make my brother friend.

HERRICK. [*Alive to the expedition's danger*] Good God! What am I to do?

AMINA. Strood soon die—dog!

HERRICK. Listen, Amina! Strood and I not friends, but I never let Strood, Lockyer, Collie die. Understand? Never!

AMINA. No. Strood die. He strike me.

HERRICK. Take me to your brother. Come, now at once.

AMINA. No! Amina cross river now—take Herrick home.

HERRICK. Very well then—I go to join Strood and Lockyer.

AMINA. Ah, no! Why you care for Strood—he not care for you!

HERRICK. I don't care for Strood; but white men stick together.

AMINA. He enemy.

HERRICK. Come, now! Do what I tell you. Guide me to your brother.

AMINA. [*Passionately*] I live two year with Herrick—not want my people now. Not want forest—want only Herrick.

HERRICK. I swear by Allah, that you live no more with me unless you take me to your brother.

AMINA. If my brother know Strood strike me, he kill him.

HERRICK. You won't tell him. Come, now! Come!

AMINA. My brother angry. Why Strood come in his country? Make bad for my brother's trade. Send news to white men that my brother catch slave. Amina know. She hear talk. My brother all ready to kill Strood now. Strood very few men—very weak.

HERRICK. Amina, once for all, take me to your brother, or you never see me again.

AMINA. [*Beating her breast*] Ah, no! I do all

for Herrick—burn rope—come all this way alone in forest to save his life.

HERRICK. Save the others too, then!

AMINA. Not Strood—bad man; leave Herrick and Doctor Frank behind to die.

HERRICK. Will you take me to your brother?

AMINA. [*Impassive suddenly*] You angry—I do what you tell.

FRANKS *has appeared in the opening of the hut.*

FRANKS. The canoe's gone, Herrick.

HERRICK. [*Holding out the letter and pointing with it to the* GIRL] She escaped. She's got this still.

FRANKS. And Strood?

HERRICK. In mortal danger, all of them! Her brother's the only chance. She must take me to him, now—at once.

FRANKS. And we?

HERRICK. Make a raft. Hang on, Franks; get across somehow. I'll come back or send a message within three days. They're in worse straits than we are—far.

FRANKS. [*In a low voice*] Can you trust her?

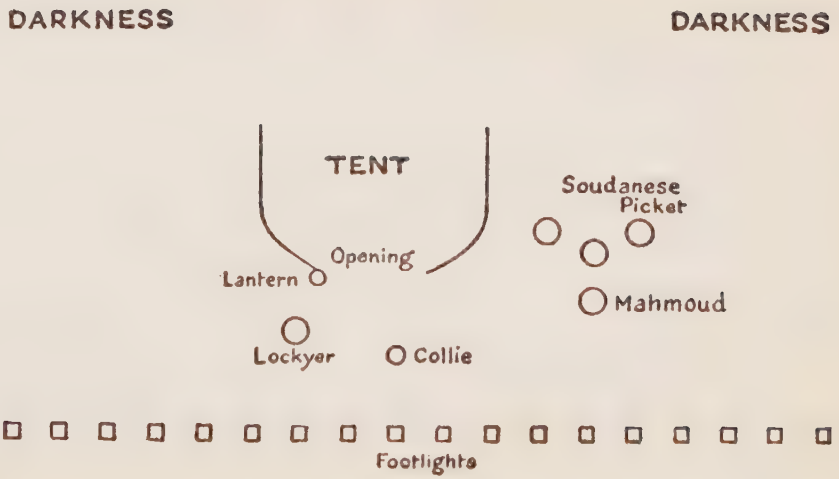
HERRICK. With myself? Yes. Good-bye, old man. Amina—come!

He goes out. The GIRL *follows him.*

FRANKS *stands aside, watching them go.*

CURTAIN.

ACT III


DARKNESS
DARKNESS
TENT
Opening
Lantern
Soudanese
Picket
Mahmoud
Lockyer
Collie
Footlights

ACT III

SCENE I

The tent of LOCKYER *and* COLLIE *in the forest, evening of the following day, four short marches from the Lualaba river. An oil lamp illumines the tent, the front side of which is open. Around is the loom of the forest; the faint outline of another tent is seen on one side and on the other four* SOUDANESE *are grouped—three squatting, one leaning on his rifle.*

LOCKYER *and* COLLIE, *in front of the tent, have just finished their scanty meal of bananas and biscuit, and are lighting their pipes—rifles and revolvers close at hand. Now and then drifts up the sound of native drums beaten out in the forest.*

COLLIE. [*Listening*] Those damned drums! Heh! but 'tis awfu' like the Salvation Army in Glasgow.

LOCKYER. Salvation! Rum idea that! What do you make of it, Collie?

COLLIE. We—el! I've known maself verra queer —times. A wee bit more, and I wouldna've been answerable for the consequences. Have ye never felt lik' that?

LOCKYER. Never!

COLLIE. That's your upbringin'. Ye can always tell an English gentleman—never drunk on anything but liquor.

LOCKYER. Well! He makes up there.

COLLIE. Wish to God I were drunk now. The girl's escape has fair finished us. We won't last to the Lomami river.

LOCKYER. What distance d'you make it still?

COLLIE. Forty miles. We've not come thirty these four days, and lost twelve men. And Strood won't turn; the man's demented.

LOCKYER. [*With a shrug*] Mahmoud!

[*The* SOUDANESE *on foot comes up at the call.*

Keep on your rounds, there!

The MAN *salutes, and goes on his round to the Right.*

I've got fever coming on, Collie; feel so darned talkative.

COLLIE. Aye, that's a sure sign of fever or insanity. Well, I'm no for a sleep meself till I've given Strood me mind. Got a drain of brandy there?

[LOCKYER *hands him a flask.*

LOCKYER. Collie! Mutton cutlets with new peas and asparagus, and a pint of iced champagne.

COLLIE. Na! A fresh-run salmon and a gallon o' mountain dew!

LOCKYER. Wonder what sort of a season they're having with the Quorn! What on earth brings us out into places like this? Good Lord! I think we're all

mad! This tobacco tastes rotten—always does before fever. My brother's got a horse running in the National next spring—wonder if he'll think of putting me anything on? Wonder if he thinks of me at all? Wonder if anyone thinks of fools like us? Collie! Cold pigeon pie and iced claret-cup, what! Or how about marrow-bones and a bottle of Steinberg Cabinet! Oh, damn! at home I never think of what I eat. If we were Belgians, we'd be talking about women. Ever play cricket?

COLLIE. [*Shaking his head*] Na—golf's ma diversion.

LOCKYER. Rotten game! I say, what do you think death really is?

COLLIE. We'll be no needin' to *think* if Strood won't turn.

LOCKYER. Change of trains—or a black-out, eh?

COLLIE. I'm no' certain. But it canna be worse than this forest.

LOCKYER. Ah! Imagine haunting this forest!

"And I am black, but oh! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child!"

COLLIE. Here! Tak' your temperature.

[*Hands him a thermometer.*

LOCKYER. [*Refusing it*] Wonder if the Almighty ever had to keep his wicket up against bowling like this? Almighty? But *if Almighty,* Collie—He can change the attack whenever it doesn't suit Him.

COLLIE. Na! I'm thinkin' the Deity has a manly

vocation. Fancy findin' ye'd made this forest! That'd tak' some livin' down.

LOCKYER. It is a corker. But think how we shall look back on it! By George! I can see myself with a long drink looking back.

COLLIE. Aye! Ye've got fever. Tak' some of these.

[*Handing him a little bottle of tabloids.*

LOCKYER. [*Swallowing two tabloids*] Married, aren't you, Collie?

[COLLIE *nods.*

That's bad. Children?

COLLIE. Two. Bonnie bairns.

LOCKYER. What on earth brought *you* out here?

COLLIE. We—el! Ah've got ambeetions for them.

[LOCKYER *bursts into a sort of laughter.*

LOCKYER. Sorry, old man! Only—ambitions here! It's rather—funny—what!

COLLIE. Aye! And I'm goin' to see Strood about it.

He gets up and passes towards the other tent at the back.

LOCKYER. [*To himself*] Poor old Collie!

The sound of the drums rises. LOCKYER *leans forward over his crossed legs, listening. The drum beats swell.*

LOCKYER. Gosh!

The SOUDANESE, *who have been squatting in talk, rise; they are joined by* MAHMOUD, *and come down to* LOCKYER.

MAHMOUD. Capt'n Sahib! Men say no go any more

—in morning all run away. This too bad country—bad men—cannibal.

The beating of the drums seems to come from every side. The SOUDANESE *manifest an attentive alarm.*

No can go more.

LOCKYER. [*Grasping his revolver and rising to his feet*] 'Shun!

[*The* MEN *stand half-heartedly at attention.* What's this, Mahmoud? If I tell Strood Sahib, he'll have you shot for mutiny.

MAHMOUD. No can shoot all. In morning all go.

LOCKYER. Come, Mahmoud—soldiers are not afraid. Obey orders.

MAHMOUD. [*Touching his mouth and stomach, imitated by the others*] No can march if not eat. Lockyer Sahib tell men "Right about." Then obey—men march—all go back to river. Lockyer Sahib good—our officer—Strood Sahib——

[*He shakes his head.*

LOCKYER. Mahmoud!

MAHMOUD. [*Grimly*] Our officer—he lead us—no mutiny then.

LOCKYER. You scoundrel! How dare you?

MAHMOUD. No, Sahib, we not bad—we hungry—got sores—no like die for not'ing. Carrier men run away—leave us—then all die quick—white men too. [*With a salute*] Lockyer Sahib, save um all.

LOCKYER. You are under my orders, Mahmoud! I am under Strood Sahib's.

MAHMOUD. [*Fiercely*] By Allah! No can go more.

LOCKYER *blows a whistle. There is a stir, and the emaciated forms of* CARRIERS *gather in the darkness behind the* SOUDANESE *to the left.* COLLIE *and* STROOD *come hurriedly from the darkness Right, with revolvers in their hands. They are followed by* SADIG.

STROOD. What's this, Captain Lockyer?

LOCKYER. The men refuse to march to-morrow.

STROOD. Who speaks for them?

LOCKYER. [*Pointing*] Mahmoud—there.

STROOD. [*Covering him with his revolver*] Put him under arrest.

LOCKYER. [*To* MAHMOUD] Ground arms!

MAHMOUD *lays down his rifle and folds his arms with a certain dignity.*

STROOD. Now, my man, refuse orders to-morrow morning, and you'll be shot. [*To the* CARRIERS] Listen, children. Those who run away—all killed by Batetela.

Two of the CARRIERS *emerge from among the huddled mass of them. They are poor, emaciated creatures.*

1ST CARRIER. Master! No food—got many sores—got fever. Dis bad caravan. Go back to ribber—cross ribber—some food.

2ND CARRIER. We not engage come in dis country, master; hab wife—hab children. Soon we fall down—no able carry load. Look, master! We not go-ee, go-ees. Look! [*He lifts the rag of his garment*

to display his emaciated leg, disfigured by a great sore.]

[LOCKYER *turns his head away.*

STROOD. Listen! [*Pointing to* MAHMOUD] This man tell you wrong. No can go back. If go back, Batetela attack, kill every man. Now, sons, trust me. No one else can save you. Trust me.

The CARRIERS *look at him, beseeching, doubting, trying to see if he is speaking truth.*

1ST CARRIER. [*A Zanzibari*] Master, to-day Khamis die—[*pointing to 2nd* CARRIER] to-morrow Umari die—[*pointing to another*] my brother Mabruk he die soon; this too far from our country—bad forest—bad men—eat enemy.

3RD CARRIER. [MABRUK] Master, two moons we travel—carry load too fast—all that thick forest not like our country. Sometime no food—our stomach empty. When we try find food—No!—White men drive on—drive on. Sometime want little sleep—sit down—white man come with whip—[*he makes the appropriate gesture*] We not go-ee go-ees. We men—not dog.

STROOD. Not men, Mabruk—children! The whip saved your lives. You fools! stray away in that forest, you never come back! Manyema in that old forest; Batetela in this forest. Keep together, children, keep on, keep on; if not, death all round to take you, Mabruk.

3RD CARRIER. Inshallah—death come when it come. Me tired—me sick——

STROOD. Listen, my son; listen, all! In four days I bring you out of the forest. Bring you to good country—plenty food—no bad men—more carriers—plenty more! All this way—a little further, and we're safe. Courage, men! Trust me! Now go and sleep! Go and sleep! To-morrow we march quickly!

He waves his hand, and the shadowy figures melt away into the darkness, with murmurs of: "Inshallah! Inshallah!"

Mahmoud, take up your rifle! Obey orders!

MAHMOUD *resumes his rifle, and the* FOUR SOUDANESE *retreat to their picket.*

LOCKYER. Poor devils!

STROOD. [*Turning on him*] Our only chance is carrying on. We're in mid-stream. The pressure'll get less.

COLLIE. Ye'll never get 'em forrard. There's a limit; and it's well to know when ye've reached it.

STROOD. No limit to will power, Collie, none!

COLLIE. There's a limit to human strength. Ye're sacrificing the lot of us for no good. Turn back!

STROOD. Never! Never have, never shall. You, Lockyer—a soldier! One spurt and we'll win out. Come!

LOCKYER. If you order me on [*with a shrug*] I'll go.

STROOD. I do. Collie!

HERRICK'S *voice from the darkness; "Don't shoot! Friends!"*

LOCKYER. Herrick!

The THREE MEN *stand alert and waiting. From Left Back appear* HERRICK *and* AMINA, *surrounded by the* SOUDANESE *picket.*

STROOD. Seize that wench!

HERRICK. [*Who looks exhausted*] No. [*He takes the* GIRL *by the arm.*] Drink.

LOCKYER *hands him a water-bottle, which he passes to the* GIRL *first. She drinks and sinks down, squatting and watching.*

HERRICK, *after drinking, takes out the letter.*

STROOD. She had it—after all? So much for squeamishness, Captain. Twelve men lost by it!

HERRICK. Do you want this letter delivered now?

STROOD. [*Sardonically*] Do we want to live?

HERRICK. Amina, go—fetch your brother.

AMINA *stands up. Her eyes seem to stab* STROOD.

Go! Call him.

As if hypnotised, the GIRL *sways out to the edge of the clearing and is lost among the trees. The* MEN *stand waiting. Presently a long, shrill, peculiar call is heard—repeated—then answered faintly from the forest. Round the* WHITE MEN *grouped in the light from the tent lantern, and the motionless* SOUDANESE, *the emaciated forms of the* CARRIERS *can be seen dimly to the Left, gathering in the darkness.*

COLLIE. Is she for a bit o' new treachery, d'ye think?

HERRICK. Got any brandy?

LOCKYER *hands him the flask and some biscuits.*

HERRICK *drinks from it and nibbles a biscuit.*

You're surrounded here.

STROOD. [*To* LOCKYER] Take your men and see what she's doing.

HERRICK. Wait! Wait!

There is another moment of silent waiting. Then TWO FIGURES *are seen coming from the darkness, Right Back. The* GIRL *comes first, and after her, imposing, dark, hawk-faced, clad in light garments, her brother, the half-caste Arab,* SAMEHDA. *She leads him up to the group, and the two stand silent and apart.*

HERRICK. Samehda! Salaam!

AMINA. [*To her brother*] Herrick—good.

HERRICK *advances, holding out the letter. As he does so,* AMINA *says something low and rapid to her brother in their language.*

HERRICK. From Samway.

SAMEHDA *steps forward and takes the letter with a salaam. He reads it by the light of the oil lantern and then retreats and stands with his head drawn back, looking*

from one white man to another, AMINA *at his elbow.*

SAMEHDA. Chief man?

AMINA *points to* STROOD, *and again speaks low and rapidly in a language the white men do not understand.*

SAMEHDA. [*Making a movement to silence her*] Samway—my brother. You Strood?

STROOD *advances, holding out his hand.* SAMEHDA *does not take it, but salaams.*

SAMEHDA. Palaver.

After a certain hesitation they sit down cross-legged. The CARRIERS *also squat in the background; only the* SOUDANESE *remain standing, leaning on their rifles.*

SAMEHDA. Belgian man here?

STROOD. No; Englishmen—all.

SAMEHDA. [*With a deep sound*] Belgian my enemy. Belgian kill many my people—take away my slave. Why you come my country?

STROOD. Samehda, we are no friends of Belgians. We come to take Belgian country many marches from here. [*Pointing to the south*] South—far.

SAMEHDA. [*Pointing to* HERRICK] This man friend of my sister—Samway say—long time friend?

HERRICK. [*Bowing*]. Yes.

SAMEHDA. [*Pointing to* LOCKYER] This man no Belgian?

LOCKYER. English.

SAMEHDA. [*Pointing to* COLLIE] This man?

COLLIE. Scot.

STROOD. Brother of English.

SAMEHDA. [*With a deep sound which may or may not be approval*] What you come for?

STROOD. I tell you: we pass through your country, go far south, take away some Belgian country.

SAMEHDA. [*Reserved and ironic*] I born Zanzibar —I know white men—come from across sea—take country—ivory—slave—all that belong Arab. Belgian—English—German. And all say: "Serve Allah! Free slave!" All steal from Arab.

STROOD. Arab stole first from black men, Samehda.

SAMEHDA. Then Arab keep if can; white men take if can. Arab serve Allah too.

STROOD. Allah made men free, Samehda; Arab make men slaves.

SAMEHDA. White men make slave too—carrier men. If run away—whip, shoot.

STROOD. Hear me, Samehda. Samway is my friend.

SAMEHDA. Samway my brother.

STROOD. Help us to cross your country: we will make you a large present. Come! Do what Samway asks you.

AMINA *murmurs rapidly in the unknown tongue.*

SAMEHDA. My father chief man. I his son. [*Touching* AMINA] This one his daughter—daughter of Arab chief man. You—[*he makes the motion of striking*] Why?

STROOD. She stole that letter from my tent. Suppose you have a great strong letter, Samehda, a woman steal it—what you do?

SAMEHDA. No whip for Arab. Arab not black man.

STROOD. [*Pressing him*] She did a very bad thing to steal that letter. That letter is from your brother Samway. He saved your life; Arab never forget.

SAMEHDA. [*Loftily*] Arab good man.

STROOD. Listen! You give us carriers—forty. You make all quiet for us. At the Lomami river we give you good present—some rifles—some cloth. Afterward more present—bigger.

SAMEHDA. How much rifle—how many cloth?

STROOD. Ten pieces of cloth when we reach the Lomami; after crossing, ten rifles.

SAMEHDA. You give me rifle made in Germany?

STROOD. Good rifles.

SAMEHDA. No! You give me ten English rifle now; then I see.

STROOD. At the river, Samehda.

SAMEHDA. Suppose I no help?—Batetela very many—very strong. Got poison arrow; kill all. Take all rifles, then.

STROOD. [*Vigorously*] If we are killed, a great army will avenge us. Remember your father—how the white men came.

SAMEHDA. [*With a smile*] This Belgian country. English soldier no come here. English—Belgian not good friend.

STROOD. Samehda, listen! I, too, am a chief man in my country—a strong chief. My death will make much noise. My Government will make the Belgians send an army—kill you—take your country.

SAMEHDA. [*Softly*] If you die, no one know. [*With a gesture*] Forest hide all.

STROOD. You refuse, then?

SAMEHDA. [*Elusive*] Samway my brother.

STROOD. Well?

SAMEHDA. You give me ten rifle now.

STROOD. [*Rising*] Palaver finish. I take you both with me to the Lomami river.

SAMEHDA *and the* GIRL *spring up. All are on their feet.*

No attack, while I have *you.*

SAMEHDA'S *glance slides round,* STROOD *lifts his revolver.*

Stand! Don't move!

SAMEHDA. [*With dignity*] This *peace* palaver—you no keep word.

STROOD. For our lives—you force me.

While he is speaking the GIRL *has glided forward, stooping, and strikes upward at* STROOD'S *lifted arm, with a little dagger; he drops the revolver, wounded in the wrist, and tries to seize her with the other hand; but she glides past him and away into the darkness, pursued by* TWO SOUDANESE *and* SADIG. SAMEHDA *has sprung back, drawing a knife.* LOCKYER *dashes forward to seize him;*

there is a swift ham-stringing cut and LOCKYER *stumbles, clinging to the tent-pole for support.* SAMEHDA *turns and darts away.* COLLIE *rushes in pursuit of him; they disappear in the darkness to the Right. There are two shots, then a long groan, and in wailing, chattering confusion the* CARRIERS *disperse into the darkness.*

STROOD. Stop them! Herrick! Mahmoud! Lockyer!—stop them!

He, HERRICK, *and the* SOUDANESE *dash after them.* —

LOCKYER *is left clinging to the tent-pole. One or two more shots are heard; the drum-beats swell furiously.* LOCKYER *tries to leave the support of the tent-pole and walk, but sinks to the ground. He sits there, feeling and examining his leg.*

LOCKYER. Ham-strung! My God!

He crawls back to the tent-pole, takes up his revolver and painfully raises himself till he is leaning against the pole, the lantern hanging quite close to his face. To this one lighted spot STROOD *and* HERRICK *come back.*

STROOD. Lockyer!

LOCKYER. Here!

STROOD. Gone—every rat! Soudanese too. Not a man left. Not a man!

LOCKYER. Collie?

HERRICK. I stumbled over his body.

Savage cries from the forest and the beating of drums.

They're on us.

STROOD. Into the bushes, quick! Stick together. Come!

HERRICK. Any chance?

STROOD. Yes! Yes! Come on! We'll slip through them yet. Come on—both of you. Stick close to me.

HERRICK. Hurt, Lockyer?

LOCKYER. Nothing.

STROOD. By compass—due west. Keep close, now! Keep close.

[*He moves to the Left, followed by* HERRICK.

LOCKYER. I'll just put out this light.

He extinguishes the lantern and sinks down under the lee of the tent. A moment's empty, dark silence.

HERRICK. [*Returning; in a low voice*] Lockyer! Lockyer!

STROOD'S VOICE. [*From Left*] Come on! I can hear him—he's ahead.

[HERRICK *feels the tent-pole and peers about.*

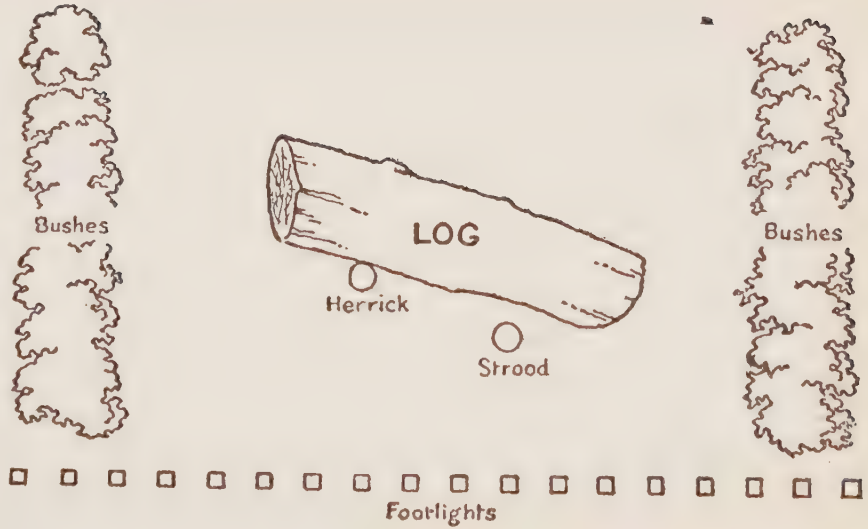
STROOD'S VOICE. Come on! Come on!

[HERRICK *goes.*

Silence but for the sound of the drums. Then dead silence.

LOCKYER'S VOICE. [*Low, in the darkness*] Good luck!

CURTAIN.


Bushes
LOG
Herrick
Strood
Bushes
Footlights

SCENE II [1]

The forest on the following day—noon. A fallen trunk, huge and rotten, with viper-like creepers, lies along the Back Centre of the scene leading up Stage. HERRICK *lies propped against the log, unconscious.* STROOD *is bending over him. He moves a step away, and himself squats down, staring at* HERRICK. *He seems to be struggling to form a resolve. He leans forward and listens for the sound of* HERRICK'S *breathing; then, at some noise, recoils, every nerve taut, listening to the forest. Nothing! He relaxes a moment in physical exhaustion. Then with an effort, again forces his mind to the forming of that resolve, fixing his queer stare on* HERRICK, *still unconscious. His shoulders shrug convulsively and he rises. He has taken two stealthy steps away when* HERRICK *stirs.* STROOD *stands still, then turns his head.* HERRICK'S *eyes have opened; they are fixed on his. The two men stare at each other without speaking. A faint smile flickers on* HERRICK'S *face.*

HERRICK. It's all right—go!

[1] With the tent gone, entirely different lighting, and a fresh backcloth, the same setting can be used as in the preceding scene.

STROOD. For water.

HERRICK. [*With the same smile*] For water?

STROOD. Do you think I was leaving you?

HERRICK. Yes. Why not? I've got a shot left. Our souls are naked here, Strood. Not worth keeping it from me. Shake hands.

STROOD. I meant to go. But damn me if I do. We'll get through yet. Lie here, I'll find some water. Back—soon!

He goes, treading stealthily away among the trees to the Left. HERRICK, *left alone, mumbles his dry lips with his tongue, and leans back against the trunk, the picture of exhaustion, with his hand on his revolver.*

HERRICK. [*Muttering*] Back—will he?

The face of AMINA *is poked out from some bushes on the Right. She steals noiselessly up to* HERRICK'S *side. With her eyes fixed on his face she waits for him to stir.* HERRICK *opens his eyes and sees her.*

HERRICK. You!

AMINA. Batetela track all night. I follow—kill one fellow in bush there. [*She shows her dagger*] Come with Amina! Samehda friend to my friend. All safe with Amina! [*Putting his hand to her breast*] Come!

HERRICK *continues to stare at her without speaking.*

AMINA. If not quick, too late. Batetela soon

here—find dead fellow—kill Herrick then. My brother not far—two three mile.

HERRICK. Strood.

AMINA. Quick!

HERRICK. Wait for him.

AMINA. No. He strike me. He break word. Strood dead man. Batetela all round—all over forest—many—soon find Herrick too.

HERRICK. [*Raising his revolver*] Not alive.

AMINA. [*Embracing his knees*] Ah! no! Come! Herrick safe with Samehda. Come quick! Strood leave you here to die.

HERRICK. No. Gone for water.

AMINA. Strood find water; he go on. Strood let all die, if he live.

HERRICK. [*Slowly*] No, I'll wait.

AMINA. If Strood come back, he shoot me.

[HERRICK *rises.*

AMINA. [*Clinging to him, twining round him, trying to draw him away into the bushes*] Come! Come!

HERRICK. Let go, girl! I'll wait!

AMINA. [*Recoiling suddenly*] Strood.

STROOD *has appeared from the forest, Left.*

HERRICK. [*With triumph, to the* GIRL] See!

[*The* GIRL *shrinks behind the trunk.*

STROOD *lifts his revolver, but the* GIRL, *interposing the trunk, creeps back into cover.*

STROOD. Why didn't you hold her? Are they on us?

HERRICK. She killed a tracker out there.

[The sound of drums is heard.

STROOD. [*Slicing a length of creeper from the tree*] Here! Tie yourself to me. Come on! She'll follow. We'll get her yet.

[They tie the creeper around their waists. The almost naked form of a SAVAGE *emerges from the bushes on the Right. With a cry, he darts back into the bushes. Yells follow and the beating of drums.*

STROOD. Back to back, when we must. Now! Into the thick.

He hastens forward, half dragging HERRICK *into the forest. Two dark* FIGURES *glide from the bushes and pass crouching. Then a splendid* SAVAGE *is seen standing clear, he leaps on to the fallen trunk, and stretches his bow. There is a shot; the* SAVAGE *shoots his arrow and leaps forward into the forest. The stage is empty again; three more shots are heard, some fierce cries; then* STROOD, *half dragging, half supporting* HERRICK, *comes back towards the trunk. Two arrows have pierced* HERRICK'S *back, the shafts visible.*

HERRICK. [*Prostrate*] Cut, cut! I'm done!

For answer STROOD *lifts him.* AMINA *emerges from the bushes, Right, and leaps towards* HERRICK. STROOD, *dropping* HERRICK, *who sinks down dead, levels*

his revolver and fires. But the revolver clicks. It is empty. He throws it down, and stands quite still, unarmed, exposed, with his eyes fixed on the GIRL, *who crouches forward towards him.*

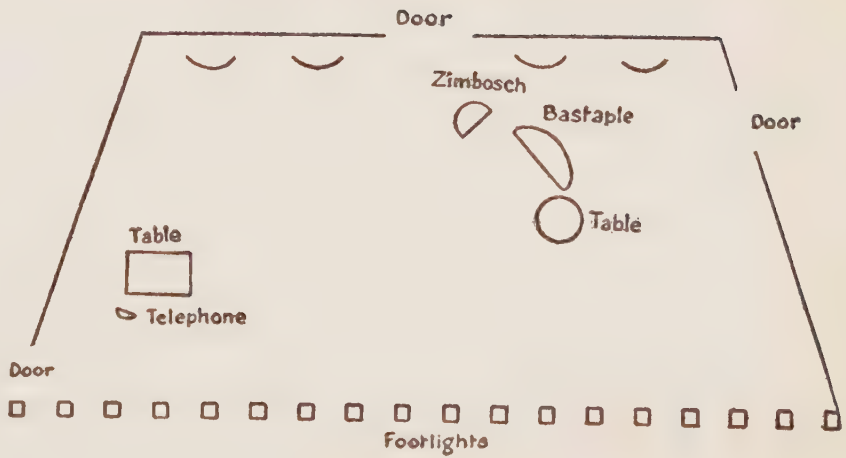
STROOD. Well! . . . Come on if you dare, you forest hell-cat!

His face has a kind of exaltation of defiance, as if holding a wild beast at bay with the force of his gaze. The GIRL *stands hypnotised. At a sound from the bushes* STROOD *turns his head for a second. Quick as thought the* GIRL *springs and drives her dagger into his heart. With a gasp, he falls against the trunk, dead. The* GIRL *flings herself down by* HERRICK'S *dead body, stroking it and uttering a crooning lament.*

A SAVAGE *steals out of the bushes and stops three paces away, looking down at* STROOD'S *half-recumbent body. A kind of contraction passes over* STROOD'S *face. The* SAVAGE *recoils, raising his spear.* STROOD'S *face relaxes in death. The* SAVAGE *bends forward, regarding the dead white man with a sort of awe. Drums are being beaten in the forest. The stage is darkened.*

CURTAIN.

ACT IV


Door
Zimbosch
Bastaple
Door
Table
Table
Telephone
Door
Footlights

ACT IV

SCENE I

The following June. Bastaple's outer sanctum in the City of London. Afternoon.

BASTAPLE *is seated at his little table.* BARON ZIMBOSCH *in a chair to his right.*

ZIMBOSCH. Since the middle of May, Mr. Bastaple, they have been sitting there at Bloemfontein, Milner and Oom Paul Kruger. Well, it is over—the Conference.

BASTAPLE. What's the result?

ZIMBOSCH. Impasse. The more Kruger ask, the more Milner refuse; the more Milner ask, the more Kruger stick his heel. No one will know for a fortnight; but take it from me, Mr. Bastaple: this is a cert—no agreement.

BASTAPLE. H'm!

ZIMBOSCH. [*Nodding*] War—in the autumn. When the result of this Conference is known—up go the temperatures. A bad attack of war fever—you will see.

BASTAPLE. Quite sure about your news?

ZIMBOSCH. Absolute! Cable this morning; best information from the back stair. You may bottom your dollar on it, Mr. Bastaple. My word—

Africans! La! La! But you have a fortnight still before the news is out. Your friend Beton has his General Meeting the day after to-morrow, isn't it? If he gets his coolie labour, you have your chance to get out yet. I admire Robert Beton, he is idealist to his tiptoes. *Bon Dieu!* you are all idealists in this country.

[BASTAPLE *smiles.*

Ah! not you, Mr. Bastaple—not you!

The door, Back, is opened, and FARRELL *appears; he closes and is about to advance when* BASTAPLE *waves him back.*

BASTAPLE. One minute, Farrell.

[FARRELL *retires.*

ZIMBOSCH. [*Rising*] Well, I hope I have brought you some useful news this time. You remember how Rothschild won the battle of Waterloo. And they put that lion up in the sky—the British-Belgian lion! My Lord! What a monster! Curious no country has taken a tiger for its pet animal!

BASTAPLE. No uplift about a tiger, Baron.

ZIMBOSCH. [*Preparing to go*] And our steamers, Mr. Bastaple? We are looking to you for that loan.

BASTAPLE. You have my word, Baron.

ZIMBOSCH. The word of Adrian Bastaple. [*With a bow*] Good afternoon then, Mr. Bastaple. You have yet a fortnight.

[*He is moving to the door back.*

BASTAPLE. [*Rising and motioning to the door, Right*] This way, Baron.

He shows him out, then presses his bell. FARRELL *enters from his room.*

FARRELL. Mr. Beton is here, sir; but Mr. Stanforth and Lord Elderleigh have not yet come.

BASTAPLE. What are South African Concessions at this afternoon?

FARRELL. Still sagging, sir—fifteen shillings.

BASTAPLE. Back about three-sixteenths all round, um?

FARRELL. Yes, sir. Oh! you saw this, sir, in this morning's paper? [*Reads from cutting*] "Dr. Clement Franks arrived in London yesterday from Mombasa. He has lately returned from the Congo, where he accompanied Mr. Strood, Captain Lockyer, and Mr. Collie in the expedition of which as yet no news has been received. Dr. Franks was left at the Lualaba river, in command of the men who were unfit to travel further. His mission in London is to communicate with those who promoted this mysterious adventure. He declined to give our representative any further details."

BASTAPLE. Yes, I saw that.

FARRELL. Will you have Mr. Beton in?

BASTAPLE. Yes.

FARRELL. [*Opening the door*] Oh! the others have just come, sir. Will you come in, gentlemen?

BETON *comes in, followed almost immediately by* STANFORTH *and* LORD ELDERLEIGH.

BETON. Seen that about Franks, Bastaple? I hope to God he'll give us some good news.

ELDERLEIGH. He sent a letter overland to his cousin Mr. Tregay.

BETON. What does he say?

STANFORTH. [*Coldly*] We have come about that.

ELDERLEIGH. I'm afraid we shall have to speak plainly. Mr. Tregay holds the theory that this expedition has been dust in our eyes, Mr. Beton. It appears you are bringing forward a scheme for coolie labour at your meeting the day after to-morrow which is entirely—entirely contrary to our ideals and views. Mr. Tregay has suggested that you and Mr. Bastaple have tried to blind us with this anti-slavery expedition. He calls it a red herring.

BASTAPLE. Mr. Tregay is a picturesque person, my lord.

ELDERLEIGH. That may be. But this coolie scheme is not a figure of speech, and we—I speak for Nonconformist opinion—are dead against it.

STANFORTH. I speak for Liberalism—dead against it. Africa is for the white man, and we won't have the yellow there, nor that dressed-up slavery, indentured labour.

BETON. Africa will not be for the white man in our time, *without* my coolie labour. I want to see the white man there, and you don't care two straws about it. No, you don't—neither of you. You just want to air your principles, or whatever you call them. Very well; it's a fight.

ELDERLEIGH. I should like to know: was it a red herring?

BASTAPLE. Really, my lord——

BETON. It was; I don't care a damn whether you know it or not. I'm too sorry about those poor fellows swallowed up in that forest.

ELDERLEIGH. Stanforth, is there anything to stay for?

STANFORTH. No, there's everything to go for.

ELDERLEIGH. Then we meet the day after to-morrow at—Philippi. Good afternoon!

[*They go out.*

BETON. This is a bolt from the blue! We've made a mistake not to have proxies, Bastaple. The cat's out of the bag and might just as well have been out sooner. Well, I shall let myself go at the meeting —they'll get it from the shoulder. "Africa for the white man!" Bunkum! It'll take a hundred years that way. I want to see my dreams come true in my lifetime.

BASTAPLE. The market's got wind; shares are sagging.

BETON. Let 'em; their future's safe.

BASTAPLE. The Boers, Beton?

BETON. Oh! old Kruger will have climbed down all right. If Dr. Franks comes here, let me have the news. I must go to work on this. I shall get it through, yet.

He goes out, Back. BASTAPLE *is left brooding.*

BASTAPLE. [*To himself*] Not he! [*He takes a*

sheet of paper and begins figuring] A damned bad hole!

He crosses over to the telephone, takes up the receiver, but puts it back again. After a turn up and down, he goes to the table, takes a cigar from the box, and is about to light it when

FARRELL *enters, Right, from the waiting-room.*

FARRELL. Dr. Franks, sir, in the waiting-room.

BASTAPLE. Oh! very well!

[FARRELL *retires to his own room.*

BASTAPLE *replaces the cigar, crosses to the waiting-room, and opens the door.*

BASTAPLE. Dr. Franks? Adrian Bastaple.

FRANKS *comes in. Very sun-dark and thin, with the look of a man who has been through a terrible strain. He is a great contrast to* BASTAPLE.

BASTAPLE. Glad to see you, Dr. Franks. Read of your arrival in this morning's paper. What news?

FRANKS. [*Taking a long envelope from his pocket*] You had the long cable I sent through your agents at Mombasa?

[BASTAPLE *nods.*

This is my detailed report. But from the time Strood left me at the Lualaba river, I've no news—none. They went on in hostile country—thick forest ahead—savage cannibals; they were very weak, very ill-provided in every

way to resist attack. They must have foundered utterly.

BASTAPLE. But you?

FRANKS. By a miracle I got through to Tanganyika with six out of the twelve men left with me.

BASTAPLE. [*Impressed by his voice and his look*] You have been through much, I'm afraid.

FRANKS. [*Sombrely*] The forest.

BASTAPLE. And you struck no signs of the slave trade?

FRANKS. None. You'll find it all here.

[*Handing the report.*

BASTAPLE. Shortly—what's the story?

FRANKS. We travelled from the Albert Edward to the Lualaba——

BASTAPLE. One second. [*He goes to the table, takes out and spreads a map*] Put your finger on the places.

They stand side by side behind the table, and FRANKS *touches the map from time to time.*

FRANKS. From here to here at the utmost speed we could manage in that forest; forced marches, avoiding native villages, every human being we could.

BASTAPLE. How do you account for that?

FRANKS. After we'd crossed the Lualaba river—which was never in the programme as we thought—Strood told us: he was not really looking for the slave trade. His objective was down here [*points*]

—diamond fields, reported to him by an elephant-hunter called Samway.

BASTAPLE. Diamonds?

FRANKS. Besides Samway, a Belgian knew of them, he was travelling from Basoko—here—to claim them. Strood was racing him.

BASTAPLE. A wild departure, Dr. Franks.

FRANKS. Strood seemed to think the discovery important to the British Empire; our lives of no account so long as he got there first.

BASTAPLE. [*Brooding*] You were left here [*he points*], you say? Why mightn't Strood have got through?

FRANKS. Imagine the back of night, the bottom of hell, and you'll have some conception of the conditions.

BASTAPLE. Still—you yourself——

FRANKS. I recrossed the river. The country's terrible enough, but not full of hostile cannibals. If he hadn't perished, some news *must* have filtered through.

BASTAPLE. What about that Belgian expedition?

FRANKS. It turned back.

BASTAPLE. Ah!

FRANKS. Strood was alone among us in wishing to go on. [*With a sudden look at* BASTAPLE] May I ask you a question?

[BASTAPLE *nods.*

Was he told to embroil us with the Belgians?

BASTAPLE. He was told to look for the slave trade, Dr. Franks.

FRANKS. Forgive me. I——

BASTAPLE. [*With a conciliatory wave of his hand; tracing on the map*] All this country in front of Strood. What is there?

FRANKS. Forest, marsh, hostile natives. Further on, I believe, it's better.

BASTAPLE. No white posts?

FRANKS. Not south of him.

BASTAPLE. [*His eyes very alive*] I see. Dr. Franks, we owe you a great debt for what you've been through. In what way can I serve you?

FRANKS. Oh? thank you—none.

BASTAPLE. What are you going to do now?

FRANKS. See Captain Lockyer's people, and Mr. Collie's. After that, I don't know.

BASTAPLE. Is any money due to you?

FRANKS. No; it was all paid up at Mombasa. [*Looking suddenly at* BASTAPLE] I want to forget the whole thing—if I can.

BASTAPLE. I understand: painful—newspaper gossip, and all that. The less said!

FRANKS. Yes. But with my report my duty ends. I can make no promises.

BASTAPLE. Why should you, Dr. Franks? Why should you? [*He rings*] I shall read your report at once.

[FARRELL *enters.*

Please leave your address. Many thanks, again. Good-bye!

FRANKS. Good-bye.

[FARRELL *and* FRANKS *go out.*

BASTAPLE, *alone, brings his hands together, presses the palms closely, rubs them; then stands still. On his face is the look of a man who suddenly sees his way. Then, going to the map, he examines it, passing his finger down, as if tracing an imaginary route. When he raises his head, the expression on his face has changed to one of great determination. He rings the bell and stands behind the map, waiting.*

[FARRELL *enters.*

FARRELL. Yes, sir?

BASTAPLE. Farrell, Dr. Franks has been telling me about Strood's expedition. Follow me. [*He traces with his finger on the map*] It seems that when Franks was left behind, here, Strood was making for some diamond fields—there in the Kasai—to secure them for South African Concessions.

FARRELL. [*Startled*] Indeed, sir?

BASTAPLE. Dr. Franks thinks he cannot possibly have reached those diamond fields, and that the whole expedition has foundered. I think—he is unduly pessimistic.

FARRELL. You—you do, sir?

BASTAPLE. I shouldn't be surprised if at any moment we had news—of his having reached them. My instinct is not often wrong. [*As if to himself*] A new De Beers discovered for South African Concessions—! God-sent! God-sent, Farrell!

FARRELL. [*His mouth opening a little*] Yes, sir.

BASTAPLE. But no use, if it doesn't come within a fortnight. When the Transvaal news is out, Africans will drop to nothing.

FARRELL. Oh! . . . If Strood—how should we be likely to hear, sir?

BASTAPLE. [*Pointing to map*] From the west coast, I imagine—a Portuguese source, probably. [*Turning to* FARRELL] If coolie labour doesn't go through, Farrell, I am face to face with something like disaster.

FARRELL. [*Gazing intently*] I—I—see, sir. I heard of the opposition; Mr. Stanforth was most sarcastic. But is there *no* chance of coolie labour going through?

BASTAPLE. We must wait for the General Meeting. If it does go through, Strood's success is less material. If it doesn't—and it won't, Farrell, it won't—his success is vital. [*A pause—with sudden emphasis*] But he's no more a man to fail than I.

FARRELL. N—no, sir.

BASTAPLE. [*Hardening*] Did you ever know my instinct wrong?

FARRELL. N—no, sir.

BASTAPLE. Dr. Franks got through, then why not Strood? We are not all so pessimistic, Farrell.

FARRELL. N—no, sir.

BASTAPLE. What shares are left in my name?

FARRELL. Only the twenty thousand, sir.

BASTAPLE. Good. The rest are to be sold at any price above a pound. [*Putting his finger on a spot in the map*] Study this map.

He crosses to the door and goes through into his inner sanctum.

FARRELL *is left gazing at the map with round eyes. He blows out his cheeks and lets them slowly subside.*

FARRELL. [*To himself*] What a man!

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

[*The same, in the afternoon, four days later.*

[FARRELL *is at the telephone.*

FARRELL. No, he's been out of town the last three days. . . . Yes . . . I quite follow—two currents—selling on the coolie failure—buying on this report . . . much the stronger! . . . I see. What have they touched? . . . Thirty shillings! Still upward? . . . Ah, ha! Batson! buy me five thousand for Mr. Bastaple's account; you've just time before they close. . . . Yes, yes. . . . Exactly. . . . Right. [*Cutting off. To himself*] Buying! [*He sits, smiling.*] A master stroke.

The door, Back, is opened and BASTAPLE *comes in, top-hatted.* FARRELL *starts up and looks at him eagerly. But his face is like that of a graven image. He passes without a word into his inner sanctum.* FARRELL *is hesitating whether to follow, when he comes back without hat or gloves.*

BASTAPLE. Well, Farrell?

FARRELL. There's been a very heavy rise all day on this report—buying mostly from the general public. [*With his quick look*] There's been heavy selling too, sir. [*A little meaning smile.*

BASTAPLE. Really?

FARRELL. Yes, sir. The demand is so great, I fully expect all the dummies will be sold before closing time. [*He rubs his hands.*] In fact, I'm waiting for——

BASTAPLE. Did you get my wire?

FARRELL. Yes, sir, and I've bought you the fifteen thousand, in three hands; it—it must be well over the City that you're buying. [*Nervously*] Er—"Another De Beers," that's what——

BASTAPLE. Yes, this report about Strood is almost too good to be true. Where did it come from, Farrell?

FARRELL. [*With his quick look*] Portuguese source, sir.

BASTAPLE. As I thought. Mr. Beton been here?

FARRELL. Yes, sir; he came the morning after the General Meeting, very upset by the coolie failure. And again this morning about the report of Strood's finding these diamonds. I told him you'd been out of town ever since he was here with Mr. Stanforth and Lord Elderleigh.

BASTAPLE. What did he say to this report about Strood?

FARRELL. Seemed doubtful, sir—wanted to know what *you* thought. I told him; I'd just had a wire from you to buy. *That* impressed him. But he said this find wouldn't console him for the smash of his coolie scheme. Only Strood's being safe was a great relief. He wanted to know if the

news had come from Dr. Franks. I said I thought not. Dr. Franks had been here, but he had no news.

BASTAPLE. I must see Dr. Franks again. Send for him.

[*He goes back into his inner sanctum.*

FARRELL *stands for a moment looking after him, nervously licking his lips. He has turned to the door, Back, to go out, when it is opened and a* CLERK *says:*

CLERK. Mr. Tregay and Dr. Franks, sir.

[*They come in.*

TREGAY. Mr. Farrell, can we see your chief?

FARRELL. Certainly, sir. He was just saying he wanted to see Dr. Franks. Will you take a seat?

TREGAY *and* FRANKS *stand over on the Right, and* FARRELL *goes into the sanctum. He returns almost immediately.*

FARRELL. In a minute, gentlemen. Will you smoke?

They will not, and FARRELL *goes into his room, with a quick look round at them. They are close together and speak in low voices.*

TREGAY. You've told no one else what Strood was really after?

FRANKS. Not a soul.

TREGAY. Any proof.

FRANKS. My word of honour.

TREGAY. Not legal tender, Clement.

FRANKS. Isn't a man's word believed in the City?

TREGAY. It has been known.

FRANKS. I must have my name cleared of this, Roger. In my report there wasn't a shred of hope that Strood could ever reach those diamonds. What am I to say to poor Lockyer's people, and to Collie's, now? What am I to do?

TREGAY. Keep your head, my boy.

While he is speaking BASTAPLE'S *door is opened, and he comes in.*

BASTAPLE. Good evening, gentlemen.

They turn abruptly. TREGAY *reserved, ironic.* FRANKS *tense and quivering.*

I've read your report, Dr. Franks. Terrible, that forest! I was just sending round to you about this news in the papers.

FRANKS. I came about that.

BASTAPLE. I thought you unduly pessimistic the other day.

FRANKS. You believe it?

TREGAY. Striking coincidence, Mr. Bastaple.

BASTAPLE. How do you mean?

TREGAY. On Monday my cousin reports Strood's objective; on Thursday comes the news that he has reached it.

BASTAPLE. You think something let fall by Dr. Franks has inspired the imagination of some journalist?

FRANKS. I've let nothing fall.

BASTAPLE. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] How about Mr. Tregay——? Walls have ears, Dr. Franks.

FRANKS. [*Drawing a cutting from his pocket*] "On behalf of South African Concessions?" How could I have said that? I've been away six years—didn't even know there was such a concern.

BASTAPLE. Ever heard of Robert Beton?

FRANKS. Yes, from Strood.

BASTAPLE. Robert Beton *is* South African Concessions. Beton picked him for this trip.

FRANKS. [*Flustered*] Yes; but I—I've never spoken of Beton.

BASTAPLE. Well! It looks more and more as if the news were true. We must try and verify it, Dr. Franks.

TREGAY. How about beginning in this office?

BASTAPLE. The report, you mean? . . . Hasn't been out of my personal possession, Mr. Tregay. [*He takes it from his breast pocket*] And since I saw Dr. Franks, I've been away from town until an hour ago.

TREGAY. Walls have ears, Mr. Bastaple.

BASTAPLE. Not these walls, gentlemen, or a good many projects would have gone agley.

FRANKS. [*Excitedly*] There's a wild buying of shares, they tell me. See this headline: "Another De Beers."

BASTAPLE. Let's look at that wording. [*Reading the cutting*] "Another De Beers is reported to have been discovered on behalf of South African Concessions, by the explorer John Strood, who

last autumn penetrated the Congo region from the Albert Edward Nyanza." Been down to the office of that journal?

FRANKS. Yes, and to others. The only answer I get is that it comes from a reliable source.

BASTAPLE. The craze for sensation—it *may* be a canard.

TREGAY. *If* so, how comes it they pitched on Strood's *real* objective?

BASTAPLE. [*Shrugging*] Exactly! how?

FRANKS. People are losing and making fortunes on the strength of this report. I don't believe it; I want my name cleared of it.

BASTAPLE. What are you going to do, then?

FRANKS. Disclaim any connection, in the papers, warn people against the report.

FARRELL *appears from his room, with evening papers in his hand. He puts them down on the little table; then hands* BASTAPLE *a slip of paper, and goes out.*

BASTAPLE. [*After a glance at the slip of paper, smiles; then, curling it up in his hand, spreads an evening journal*] Let's see if there's anything fresh about it. [*Reading to himself*] Um! It says here: "From a Portuguese source." That absolves you, Dr. Franks.

FRANKS. [*Startled*] Portuguese! If it's true, after all!

BASTAPLE. Why not? I'm buying on the strength of it. Still, send that denial of your responsibility.

TREGAY. At once, Clement, if it's to be in to-morrow's press.

FRANKS. Could I write it quietly in there?

[*He points to the door, Right.*

BASTAPLE. Certainly. You'll find everything.

FRANKS. Thanks.

[*He goes out.*

TREGAY. Might I have a look at that bit of paper in your left hand?

BASTAPLE. [*Involuntarily closing his hand*] I beg your pardon!

TREGAY. This is a ramp, Mr. Bastaple.

BASTAPLE. [*Slowly*] Are you unwell, sir?

TREGAY. Who financed the Strood expedition? You! Why? Because you wanted coolie labour to boost your shares with. Coolie labour fell down two days ago,

[BASTAPLE *makes a gesture of impatience.*

and you were in deep—or you'd never have pulled out ten thousand pounds last autumn for a slave-trade story. What then? Shares falling—time pressing; you know why, and so do I. Old Kruger—war coming. And so—you whispered "diamonds," and someone heard you, and—

[*Again* BASTAPLE *makes a movement.*

Well! Why not? You win instead of losing—someone loses instead of winning. And you have made ——? Do show me that bit of paper!

BASTAPLE. This is amusing.

TREGAY. Ah! Then, may I have a look?

BASTAPLE. You may be damned!

He takes a cigar and lights it from the little flame burning beside his cigar box.

TREGAY. [*Staring at him*] Self for self and devil take the hindmost—fine motto, Mr. Bastaple.

BASTAPLE. Confound your impudence. What business have you——?

TREGAY. My cousin is not exactly at home in this city of yours, poor devil.

BASTAPLE. You are offensive, sir.

TREGAY. I've seen your sort at work too often, stalking your game, mousing after the oof-bird. The cat force!

BASTAPLE. Romanticism! Ha!

While he speaks, FRANKS *has returned and stands amazed.*

TREGAY. Clement, there's some plain speaking going on. This rumour's a fake.

BASTAPLE. I have a witness now, sir.

TREGAY. [*Looking at his watch*] The Stock Exchange has closed. If you want to know what he's made out of this, ask him to let you see the bit of paper in his left hand. Let's take it from him! [*He steps forward.*

BASTAPLE. [*Putting his hand near the flame*] You have the advantage of me, in age and numbers, gentlemen!

[*The word brings* TREGAY *to a standstill.*

FRANKS. You say *he* issued that report?

TREGAY. Or got it issued.

FRANKS. To make money! [*With sudden passion*] By God! You people who sit here—if I

had you in the forest, at the tail of a caravan, covered with sores, with shrunken stomachs, and your ribs sticking out of you! That'd teach you not to juggle with lives!

BASTAPLE. [*Icily*] Dr. Franks, I judged from your report that your heart is better than your head. Take your romantic friend here away, and ask him quietly on what evidence he bases his fantastic accusation, and he will have to tell you "On none!" Do you understand me? None! Ask him to get you some, if he can. Beating the air is not an occupation for serious men. Go away!

TREGAY. Not so fast! You went down to the newspapers, Clement. So did I. You got nothing—you don't know the ropes. I do, and I got this. [*He takes a bit of paper from his pocket and reads*] "John Strood, English explorer for South African Concessions, discovered diamond fields Kasai, Congo Territory, March last, signed Central Press Agency, Lisbon."

FRANKS. But that sounds——

[BASTAPLE *is standing very attentive.*

TREGAY. Too slick, my boy. They gave me this at five o'clock yesterday. I wired off to a friend at Lisbon—and got this answer just before you came to see me. [*Reading*] "Press Agency Lisbon, no knowledge of message, cannot trace sender." [*He shows it to* FRANKS] What do you say to that, Mr. Bastaple?

[BASTAPLE *presses the bell.*

Cherchez l'homme—Who profits by this report?

BASTAPLE. Precisely! . . . Go and make your enquiries on the Stock Exchange. You will find that since this report appeared I have bought fifteen thousand shares and sold none. You two owe your immunity from an action to the fact that Dr. Franks has suffered what he has. [FARRELL *has appeared in the doorway*] Farrell, show these people out.

TREGAY. Hold on!

FARRELL *closes the door, and* BASTAPLE, *who is moving towards his inner sanctum, stops.*

Mr. Farrell, you knew of Strood's ultimate destination.

FARRELL. [*Hesitating*] N—no, sir—unless you—you mean——

[*His finger takes the direction of the floor.*

TREGAY. For once I'm not joking in bad taste. After Dr. Franks left last Monday, Mr. Bastaple told you.

FARRELL. [*Looking at* BASTAPLE] Did you, sir? I—I don't seem——

BASTAPLE. You must remember whether I did or not.

FARRELL. [*Closing up*] Certainly, sir; you did not.

TREGAY. Mr. Farrell, be careful.

FARRELL. I am naturally careful, sir.

TREGAY. Will you swear he didn't tell you?

BASTAPLE. This is not a Court of Law.

TREGAY. No; but you may find yourself in one.

BASTAPLE. And you, sir.

TREGAY. [*To* FARRELL] I say you knew that Strood was after those diamonds in the Kasai. I further say that on Wednesday night, after the General Meeting, when coolie labour was defeated, you wired in cipher to Lisbon instructing your agent there to send this report about Strood. Look at it!

[*He thrusts it before* FARRELL'S *eyes. While* FARRELL *is reading, all three men are staring hard at him.* FARRELL *finishes reading and looks up.*

FARRELL. I certainly did not.

TREGAY. Pardon me if I've underrated the astuteness of your methods, but somehow you got that message sent. Look at *this:* "Press Agency Lisbon no knowledge—cannot trace sender." [*He shows* FARRELL *the telegram*] Bring an action for slander if you didn't rig that report.

FARRELL. You're talking wild, sir.

TREGAY. [*Patting his pocket*] That bit of paper you brought in just now? What a nice round figure, isn't it?

Putting his hand in his pocket, bringing it out as if with the paper in it, and looking at the inside of his hand.

FARRELL. [*After a moment of suspense*] Yes, sir, what *is* the—the amount?

BASTAPLE. Your bluff called. Ha! My patience is exhausted. [*Opening the door into his inner sanctum*] Farrell.

[*He goes out, followed by* FARRELL.

TREGAY. There goes a tiger. But he's right.

Clement; we shall never bring it home to him. *His* pads leave no track.

FRANKS. [*As if to himself*] "It's a bad world, master, and you have lost your way in it." Just to make money!

TREGAY. Your own by tooth and claw, my boy. Forest law. [*He takes* FRANKS'S *arm*] Come on!

The door of the inner sanctum has been re-opened, and FARRELL *stands there.*

[*Regarding him steadily*] What about that action, Mr. Farrell? You've got two witnesses.

FARRELL. I also have a wife and children. I don't go in for luxuries.

TREGAY. He might pay you better for his dirty work.

FARRELL. [*With heat*] Whet your tongue on me; but keep it off *him*, please!

TREGAY. By Jove, Mr. Farrell, there's sand in you. Tell me, isn't he ever ashamed of himself?

FARRELL. No more than you, sir.

TREGAY. [*With a shrug*] Come along, Clement.

[*They go out, followed by the gaze of* FARRELL.

As the door is shut, BASTAPLE *comes from the inner sanctum, still smoking his cigar. He seats himself and opens a drawer of the little table.*

FARRELL. [*Nervously*] Mr. Tregay——

BASTAPLE. [*Stopping him with a gesture and taking a cheque-book from a drawer, writes*] For you. On my account with Buenos Aires. Ten per cent on [*uncrisping his left hand to read from the scrap*

of paper in it] two hundred and five thousand pounds.

He finishes the cheque and hands it to FARRELL.

FARRELL. [*Open-mouthed*] Sir!

BASTAPLE. [*Stopping his attempt to speak, with a little motion of his hand*] Increase my charities this year. Double them.

FARRELL. [*Almost in a whisper*] Yes, sir, with—with pleasure. Of course—Strood *may* have, sir, mayn't he?

BASTAPLE *turns his face towards him, and slowly smiles. Unable to bear that sardonic grin,* FARRELL *curls away to the door and goes out.* BASTAPLE *puts the piece of paper to the little spirit flame and watches it burn. Then, square to the room, takes his cigar from his mouth and emits a great puff of smoke. His face has on it a half-smile, and he stretches himself with a sigh of satisfaction, his fingers spreading and crisping unconsciously, like the claws of a cat.*

CURTAIN.

OLD ENGLISH

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

In Order of Their Appearance

Sylvanus Heythorp	Chairman of "The Island Navigation Company"
Gilbert Farney	Secretary of the Same
Bob Pillin	Of Pillin & Son, Shipowners
Charles Ventnor	Solicitor
Mr. Brownbee	A Creditor of old Heythorp
Four Other Creditors	Of old Heythorp
Rosamund Larne	A Connection of old Heythorp
Phyllis, Jock	Her Children
Joseph Pillin	Senior Partner of Pillin & Son
Adela Heythorp	Daughter of old Heythorp
Two Clerks	Of "The Island Navigation Company"
Two Directors	Of "The Island Navigation Company"
Mr. Westgate, Mr. Winkley, Mr. Budgen, Mr. Appleby	Shareholders of "The Island Navigation Company"
Eight Other Shareholders	Of the Same
A Reporter	Of the *Liverpool Press*
Letty	The Larnes' Maid-of-all-work
Meller	Old Heythorp's Body-servant
Molly	His Daughter's Irish Housemaid

TIME 1905

ACT I

SCENE I. The Board Room of "THE ISLAND NAVIGATION COMPANY" *in Liverpool. February* 12*th, five o'clock.*

SCENE II. The Same, February 13*th, three o'clock, during and after the General Meeting.*

ACT II

The LARNES' *Sitting-room at* 23 *Millicent Villas. Liverpool. February* 13*th, four o'clock.*

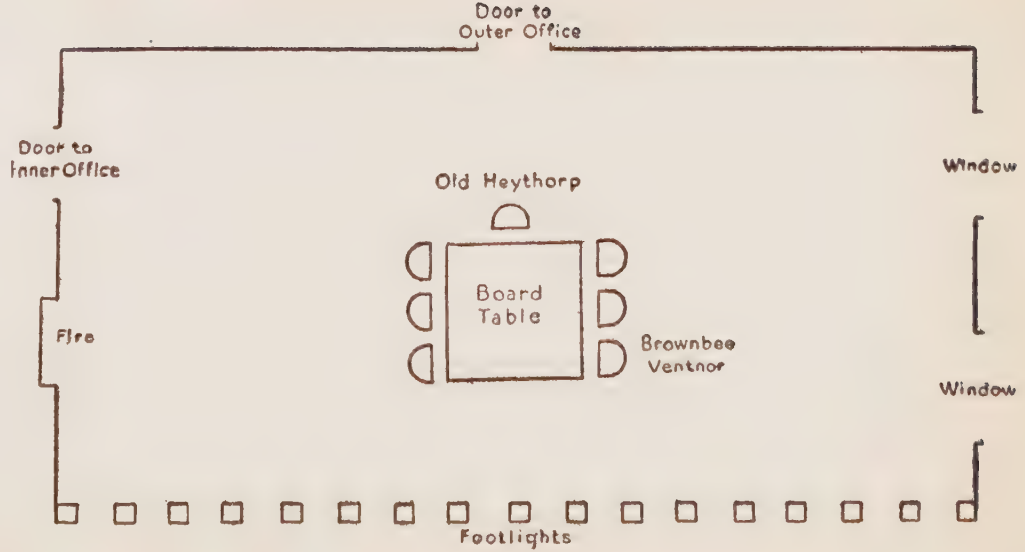
ACT III

SCENE I. OLD HEYTHORP'S *Sanctum in his daughter's house in Sefton Park. February* 14*th, five o'clock.*

SCENE II. The Same, four hours later.

SCENE III. The Same, at 11.30 *the same night.*

ACT I


Door to
Outer Office
Door to
Inner Office
Window
Old Heythorp
Board
Table
Fire
Brownbee
Ventnor
Window
Footlights

ACT I

SCENE I

The Board Room of "The Island Navigation Company, Ltd.," in Liverpool, about five in the afternoon. There are doors, Right, to the inner office, and Back, to the outer office. On the walls are photographs, and one or two models of ships. The Board is over, only the Chairman, OLD HEYTHORP, *remains, presiding over the deserted battlefield of the brain—a long table still littered with the ink, pens, blotting-paper, and abandoned documents of five persons. He is sitting at the head of the table, with closed eyes, still and heavy as an image. One puffy, feeble hand rests on the arm of his chair. The thick white hair on his massive head, his red folded cheeks, white moustache, and little tuft of white on his chin, glisten in the light from green-shaded lamps. He seems asleep.*

GILBERT FARNEY, *the Company's Secretary, enters from the outer office, Back, and steps briskly to the table. About thirty-five, he has the bright hues of the optimist in his eyes, cheeks, and lips. He begins silently*

to gather papers, but stops and looks at his Chairman. "Wonderful old boy!" he seems saying. Suddenly he sees the Chairman looking at him, and cuts off his regard. OLD HEYTHORP *heaves a rumbling sigh.*

HEYTHORP. Have they come, Mr. Farney?

FARNEY. Yes, Sir; but I wasn't going to wake you.

HEYTHORP. Haven't been asleep. Let 'em wait. Suppose you know what they've come for.

FARNEY. Did I understand, Sir, it was a meeting of your—er—creditors?

HEYTHORP. You did. Gold-mine, Mr. Farney.

FARNEY. Yes, Sir. I've heard—in Ecuador, wasn't it?

HEYTHORP. [*Nodding*] Thirteen years ago. Bought it lock, stock and barrel—half in cash, half in promises. These are the promises. Never been able to pay 'em off. The mine was as empty as their heads. [*Rumbling*] Well, not bankrupt, yet.

FARNEY. No, indeed, Sir. No one could get *you* down. Your speech for our General Meeting tomorrow? I suppose I'm to word it according to the decision of the Board this afternoon to buy the Pillin ships. That's a big thing, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Never rest on your oars; go forward or you go back. *Toujours de l'audace!*

FARNEY. I should like to have that on our writing paper, Sir: "The Island Navigation Company—*Toujours de l'audace.*" But I must say I hope freights have touched bottom. Sixty thousand

pounds is a lump for a small company like ours to lay out; there's bound to be some opposition from the shareholders.

HEYTHORP. They'll come to heel.

FARNEY. By the way, Sir, young Mr. Pillin is here. He wants to see you for a minute.

HEYTHORP. Bring him in.

FARNEY goes to the door, Back, opens it and says "Mr. Pillin!" BOB PILLIN enters; a tall young man with round, well-coloured cheeks, round eyes, little moustache, fur coat, spats, diamond pin, and silver-headed Malacca cane.

BOB PILLIN. How de do, Mr. Heythorp?

HEYTHORP. How's your father?

BOB PILLIN. Tha-anks, rather below par, worryin' about our ships. He sent me round to see if you've any news for him. He was comin' himself, only this weather——

HEYTHORP. Your father's got no chest—never had. Tell him from me to drink port—add five years to his life.

[BOB PILLIN *chuckles.*

Beginning to look forward to his shoës, eh? Dibs and no responsibility.

BOB PILLIN stops his own mouth with the head of his cane.

HEYTHORP. Scratch a poll, Poll!

[BOB PILLIN *evacuates his mouth, startled.*

Give you a note for him presently. Help me up, Mr. Farney.

FARNEY *heaves and* HEYTHORP *pulls. The old man gets on his feet and passes, unimaginably slow, towards the inner office.*

You can bring 'em in, now. [*He goes.*

BOB PILLIN. By Jove! the old boy *is* gettin' a back number. His nickname fits him down to the ground—"Old English!" He is.

FARNEY. [*Loyal to his Chairman*] He's a wonderful man. It's a treat to see him cross a road—everything has to wait for him.

BOB PILLIN. I say, those chaps in there—what have they come for?

FARNEY. I wonder, Sir. [*Opening the door into the outer office*] Come in, gentlemen. Will you wait in here, Mr. Pillin?

SIX GENTLEMEN *enter*—CHARLES VENTNOR, *first, encountering* BOB PILLIN *in the doorway.*

VENTNOR. Hallo, Pillin!

BOB PILLIN. Hallo, Ventnor! How are you?

VENTNOR. Thanks, bobbish!

BOB PILLIN. Mrs. Ventnor well?

VENTNOR. So-so.

They cross each other and BOB PILLIN *goes out.*

CHARLES VENTNOR *is short, squarely built, with a reddish-brown moustache; a certain fulvous-foxy look about him. He sits at the table. The second gentleman to come in,* MR. BROWNBEE, *is seventy years old, with a pink face and little thin grey*

whiskers. He sits next to VENTNOR. *The other* FOUR GENTLEMEN *also take seats.* FARNEY *goes into the outer office.*

VENTNOR. The old chap's got a nerve, keeping us hanging about like this.

BROWNBEE. I'm afraid he's very feeble, Mr. Ventnor—very feeble; only just gets about.

VENTNOR. He sticks to his Boards all right, Mr. Brownbee.

BROWNBEE. Can't retire, I fear—lives on his fees, they tell me.

VENTNOR. Old guinea-pig!

BROWNBEE. I think one must admire his resolution; quite a figure in Liverpool these twenty years—quite.

VENTNOR. [*Sinking his voice*] Awful old rip. Got at least one family he oughtn't to.

BROWNBEE. Tt, tt! Is that so?

VENTNOR. [*Sinking his voice*] Fact! Rosamund Larne—the story-writer—client of mine—she's the widow of a son of his born long before his marriage. Fine-looking woman she is, too.

BROWNBEE. Ah! The early Victorians! Before the influence of the dear old Queen. Well, times change.

VENTNOR. U'm! Don't know about that. But I do know he keeps me out of my money. [*Raising his voice*] If you ask me, gentlemen, we'd better break the old ship up and salve what we can.

A CREDITOR. Pretty hard wood, Mr. Ventnor; real old man-o'-war teak.

VENTNOR. Well, his autocratic airs don't suit me. I'm for putting the screw on tight.

BROWNBEE. I think—I think, if you would leave it to me, Mr. Ventnor. The *suaviter in modo*——

VENTNOR. Will never get me my three hundred.

OLD HEYTHORP has entered. A silence falls. Five of the CREDITORS *rise, but* VENTNOR *continues to sit.* OLD HEYTHORP *advances slowly, resumes his seat at the table, and looks round with a defiant twinkle. They all sit.* FARNEY *enters from the inner office, bringing a cup of tea which he places before* OLD HEYTHORP.

HEYTHORP. [*With a bow*] Excuse me, gentlemen; had a long Board. [*He conveys the cup to his mouth and drinks; his* CREDITORS *watch in suspense with which is blended a sort of admiration at his accomplishment of this difficult feat.* OLD HEYTHORP *puts the cup down, and feebly removes some drops from the little white tuft on his chin*] Well! My bankers have given you every information, I hope.

A CREDITOR. [*A Clergyman*] Mr. Heythorp, we've appointed Mr. Brownbee to voice our views. Mr. Brownbee!

BROWNBEE. Mr. Heythorp, we are here to represent about £14,000. When we had the pleasure of meeting you last July, you held out a prospect of some more satisfactory arrangement by Christmas. But we are now in February, and I am bound to say none of us get younger.

HEYTHORP. Don't you? H'm! *I* feel like a boy.

[*The* CREDITORS *shuffle.*

VENTNOR. [*To* BROWNBEE] He's going to put us off again.

BROWNBEE. [*Suavely*] I'm sure we're very glad to hear it—very glad, indeed. U'm! To come to the point, however. We feel, Mr. Heythorp, not unreasonably, I think, that—well—bankruptcy would be the most satisfactory solution. We have waited a long time, and, to be quite frank, we don't see any prospect of improvement; indeed, we fear the opposite.

HEYTHORP. Think I'm going to join the majority, eh?

[*A slight embarrassment among the* CREDITORS.

VENTNOR. Put it that way if you like.

HEYTHORP. My grandfather lived to be a hundred, gentlemen; my father ninety-six—three-bottle men, both of 'em. Only eighty odd myself; blameless life compared with theirs.

BROWNBEE. Indeed, we hope you have many years of this life before you—many.

HEYTHORP. You're getting a thousand a year out of my fees. I'll make it thirteen hundred. Bankrupt me, I shall lose my directorships, and you won't get a rap.

BROWNBEE. [*After a pause, clearing his throat*] We think you should make it at least fifteen hundred, Mr. Heythorp. We fancy you greatly underrate the possibilities of your bankruptcy.

HEYTHORP. I know 'em—you don't. My qualify-

ing shares will fetch about a couple of thousand; my bank'll take most of that. House I live in, and everything in it, bar my togs, my wine, and my cigars, belong to my daughter under a settlement fifteen years old. Got nothing else. Position in a nutshell, gentlemen.

BROWNBEE. We understand your income from your fees and dividends to be some two thousand pounds a year, Sir.

HEYTHORP. [*Shaking his head*] Nineteen hundred in a good year. Must eat and drink—must have a man to look after me, not as active as I was. Got people dependent on me. Can't do on less than six hundred. Thirteen hundred a year's all I can give you, gentlemen. No use beating about the bush; take it or leave it.

[*The* CREDITORS *rise to consult.*

VENTNOR. And if we leave it?

HEYTHORP. Kill the goose that lays the golden eggs—that's all.

BROWNBEE. Mr. Heythorp, in consideration of your—er— [*But he stops at the old man's fighting look*] we shall accept your offer of thirteen hundred a year.

HEYTHORP. Ah! Keep the bird alive—sound policy.

BROWNBEE. We certainly don't wish to press too hardly on one who for many years has been a man of mark in Liverpool. In fact, we—excuse me—admire your courage in keeping a stiff lip in spite of your—your—infirmities. [OLD HEYTHORP *bows*

to him, and he bows to OLD HEYTHORP] We feel you will do your best to give us all you can; and we—er—wish you many years of life.

CREDITOR. [*The Clergyman, rising*] I have long felt—not as a man of the world precisely—that Mr. Heythorp would feel his conscience lighter if we could relieve him of——

VENTNOR. Our money.

CREDITOR. [*Slightly disconcerted*] Well, that is perhaps in effect the position. We—er—are, in fact, a thorn in his side, and for his own good he feels no doubt that he would like to have us—er—removed. [*Laughs*] If, however, the process must be—er—prolonged——

VENTNOR. Get on with it, Sir.

CREDITOR. [*Disconcerted*] Exactly! With these few words, I am entirely at one with Mr. Brownbee.

VENTNOR. [*Sotto voce*] Amen!

HEYTHORP. Much obliged to you, gentlemen—very sporting of you. Shall act towards you in the same spirit.

BROWNBEE. Good-day, then, Sir. Don't get up, I beg.

CREDITORS. Good-day, Sir.

OLD HEYTHORP *salutes them. They follow on the heels of* MR. BROWNBEE. MR. VENTNOR *has remained behind.*

VENTNOR. Sorry not to have been able to join the mutual admiration society, Mr. Heythorp. Your debt to me is £300. I think it might be worth your while to consider whether you can't settle

that separately. I'm a lawyer, and neither very trustful nor very patient.

HEYTHORP. Go behind their backs, do you? Eh.

VENTNOR, *very angry, is about to speak, when the door from the outer office is opened, and* FARNEY *enters.*

VENTNOR. You made a big mistake in saying that, Mr. Heythorp. Good evening!

[*He goes out.*

FARNEY. I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone, Sir.

HEYTHORP. That's an ugly dog. What's his name?

FARNEY. Ventnor, Sir; a solicitor. There are two ladies to see you, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Ladies?

FARNEY. A Mrs. and Miss Larne: there's a boy with them.

HEYTHORP. M'yes! Well, show 'em in.

FARNEY *opens the door into the outer office.* ROSAMUND LARNE *enters, preceded by her children,* PHYLLIS, *and* JOCK, *who tweaks* FARNEY'S *coat-tail as he passes, then stands seraphic, gazing at the ceiling, while* FARNEY *pursues his way out with dignity.*

PHYLLIS. Jock, you *are* an awful boy! Guardy, he really is too awful.

PHYLLIS *is like a day in April, fair and fresh, and seventeen. The boy* JOCK *has a pink seraphic face, and the just breaking*

voice of fourteen; he wears Eton jacket and collar, and carries a school cap.

PHYLLIS. He won't wear his overcoat, and he will wear that frightful cap with his Eton jacket. [JOCK *puts it on dreamily*] Look! Isn't he a horror?

MRS. LARNE *takes* OLD HEYTHORP'S *puffy hand and presses it to her ample bosom. She is of a fine florid beauty and perhaps thirty-eight.*

MRS. LARNE. Dear old Guardy! Do forgive us for coming. I had to see you, and I couldn't leave these children outside, you never know what they'll do.

While she speaks the boy JOCK *has quietly pinned his mother's and sister's floating hat-scarves together, and, withdrawing, puts his fingers to his mouth and emits a piercing whistle.* PHYLLIS *rushing to thump him, the two hats fall off, and two hands fly to two heads.*

PHYLLIS. Isn't he a *pig?*

Advancing on JOCK, *she hustles him out into the outer office and stands with her back against the door.* MRS. LARNE *adjusts her hat calmly, with her low, full, seductive laugh.*

MRS. LARNE. I really had to come and see you, Guardy; we haven't had a sight of you for such an age. Phyllis, go and see after Jock, there's a darling.

PHYLLIS *tosses her head, wrenches open the door and slides out.*

How are you, dear old Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Never better. But I haven't a penny for you.

MRS. LARNE. [*With her laugh*] How naughty of you to think I came for that! But I am in a terrible fix, Guardy.

HEYTHORP. Never knew you not to be.

MRS. LARNE. Just let me tell you. It'll be some relief. I'm having the most dreadful time. [*She subsides into a chair beside him, with a luxurious sigh*] Expect to be sold up any moment. We may be on the streets to-morrow. And I daren't tell the children; they're so happy, poor darlings. I've been obliged to take Jock away from school. And Phyllis has had to stop her piano and dancing; it's an absolute crisis. But for your three hundred, Guardy, you know I'm entirely dependent on my pen. And those Midland Syndicate people—I've been counting on at least two hundred from them for my new story, and the wretches have refused it. Such a delightful story! [*She prevents a tear from rolling on to her powdered cheek with a tiny handkerchief*] It *is* hard, Guardy. I worked my brain silly over it.

HEYTHORP. Rats!

MRS. LARNE. Guardy, how can you? [*With a sigh that would rend no heart*] You couldn't, I suppose, let me have just one little hundred?

HEYTHORP. Not a bob.

MRS. LARNE *looks round the room, then leans towards him.*

MRS. LARNE. Guardy, you *are* so like my dear Philip.

HEYTHORP. Your dear Philip! You led him a devil of a life, or I'm a Dutchman.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy! [*Her eyes wandering*] This office looks so rich. I smelt money all the way upstairs. And your lovely house. We went there first, of course.

HEYTHORP. Not my house. My daughter's. She see you?

MRS. LARNE. We saw *someone* in the hall, when the butler was saying you were here at the office.

HEYTHORP. Deuce you did!

MRS. LARNE. *Such* a lovely house! Guardy, just imagine if your grandchildren were thrown out into the street. Even if they don't know it, still you *are* their grandfather.

[OLD HEYTHORP *only grins.*

Do come to my rescue this once. You really might do something for them.

OLD HEYTHORP'S *defiant cynicism gives way to an idea which strikes him.*

HEYTHORP. H'm! Do something for them! Just got an idea. Yes.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Wait a bit. I'll see. Yes! I'll see. Might be able.

MRS. LARNE. How lovely! But, Guardy, not *just*

fifty now? [OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head*] Well, [*Getting up*] you'll be sorry when we come round one night and sing for pennies under your window. Isn't Phyllis growing a sweet girl? [*Throwing clouds of perfume, to judge by the expression of* OLD HEYTHORP'S *nose, she goes out calling "Phyllis!"*]

PHYLLIS. [*Entering*] There's *such* a young man in there. He can only just see over his collar. And the way he squints at me—Lawks!

HEYTHORP. Oh! that young pup—I'd clean forgot him. Phyllis! Help me up. [PHYLLIS *tries, and they succeed*] You a good girl?

PHYLLIS. No, Guardy. Can't be when Jock's at home.

HEYTHORP. [*He pats her cheek*] Mind! Chaps like that little-headed young pup in there—not for you. All the same mould, no drive, no vices—nothing. Thinks himself a spark. Why! at his age I'd broken my neck, winged a Yankee, been drowned for a bet, and lost my last bob on the Derby.

PHYLLIS. Had you, Guardy? How *lovely!*

HEYTHORP. H'm! Just keep him looking through his dog-collar, while I write a letter.

He again pats her cheek and goes out into the inner office. A piercing whistle is heard through the open door.

PHYLLIS. [*At the fire—to herself*] There goes Jock! He's bitten that young man, or something juicy.

[BOB PILLIN *comes in.*

PHYLLIS. Oh! young man—so you've escaped! Isn't he a terror?

BOB PILLIN. [*Who is evidently much struck by her*] He is—er—rather. Er—cold, isn't it?

[*Approaches fire.*

PHYLLIS. Yes—jolly.

BOB PILLIN. [*Nervously*] I say, I've left my hat; do you think it's safe?

PHYLLIS. No, of course it isn't. I'll get it?

BOB PILLIN. [*More and more impressed*] No, no! Please don't go. It doesn't matter a bit. My name's Pillin—er—Bob. Are you a relation of "Old English"?

PHYLLIS. "Old English!"

BOB PILLIN. What! Don't you know his nickname?

PHYLLIS. No; we call him Guardy. Isn't he a chook?

BOB PILLIN. Er—I don't know that I should have called him that—er—exactly. It's my Dad who's a friend of his, don't you know?

PHYLLIS. Is your Dad like him?

BOB PILLIN. *Not much!*

PHYLLIS. What a pity!

BOB PILLIN. Ha! D'you mind tellin' me your name?

PHYLLIS. Phyllis.

BOB PILLIN. Rippin'! We live at the last house in Sefton Park.

PHYLLIS. Oh! We live at Millicent Villas. It's a poky little house. We have awful larks though.

BOB PILLIN. Your brother keeps things lively, I expect.

PHYLLIS. Yes. He goes off all the time like a squib.

[*Sounds are heard from the outer office.*

That's mother pinching him. We've never been here before. We call Guardy the last of the Stoic-uns.

BOB PILLIN. [*Still more struck*] I say—that's awfully good—that's—that's very funny.

The outer office door is opened and MRS. LARNE *appears, holding* JOCK *by the ear, and in her other hand* BOB PILLIN'S *flattened-out top hat.*

MRS. LARNE. Is this your h-h-hat, Mr.—Mr.——? [*Laughter overcomes her.* PHYLLIS *is in convulsions.* JOCK *seraphic.*]

BOB PILLIN. [*Taking it*] Er—it—it was.

PHYLLIS. I told you so.

MRS. LARNE. I'm so ashamed. I *thought* he was too quiet. And of course—he—he—was si-itting on it.

BOB PILLIN. [*With a sort of gallantry*] Really! It's—it's—nothing. It doesn't matter a bit.

PHYLLIS. Oh! young man. What a fib! Such a lovely hat!

MRS. LARNE. What *can* we do? You must come and see us, Mr. Billing.

PHYLLIS. Pillin—mother.

BOB PILLIN. Ah! er—yes.

MRS. LARNE. We shall be so pleased if you will.

BOB PILLIN. Thanks. [*Gazing at his hat*] That'll be jolly!

PHYLLIS. We'll tie Jock up.

[JOCK *rolls his eyes fearfully.*

MRS. LARNE. Yes, you horrible boy! Ah! Here's dear Guardy. I shall tell him.

JOCK *simulates terror, as* OLD HEYTHORP *enters from the inner office.*

Guardy, we must go. Good-bye! [*Lowering her voice*] Then very soon you *will* do something, won't you? The children are *so* fond of you, Guardy! [*She presses his hand and swings to the door.*]

HEYTHORP. [*To* BOB PILLIN] Go round and tell your father I want to see him—now, at once.

BOB PILLIN. Oh! Thanks awf'ly, Sir. I hope you'll cheer the old man up.

HEYTHORP. [*Pointing*] What's that thing?

BOB PILLIN. My—er—hat, Sir.

[PHYLLIS *gives way,* JOCK *simulates terror.*

MRS. LARNE. [*From the door*] Come along, you dreadful children. Mr. Pillin, will you see us to our train?

BOB PILLIN. Delighted! I—I'll just run in to our office—next door. Shan't be a shake.

PHYLLIS. [*To* BOB, *who is staring at his hat*] Oh! put it on. *Do* put it on.

BOB PILLIN *puts it on and goes.* PHYLLIS *claps her hands.* MRS. LARNE *and* JOCK *go out.*

PHYLLIS. Good-bye, Guardy dear!

HEYTHORP. Fond of me?

PHYLLIS. Oh! Guardy, I adore you. I wish you'd come and see us oftener.

HEYTHORP. Well! I'll come to-morrow.

PHYLLIS. That'll be *lovely.* [*She kisses him.*]

[*She goes out.*

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Fresh as April—clean run stock. By George, I'll do it!

[FARNEY *enters from the outer office.*

FARNEY. Miss Heythorp is below, Sir, with a carriage to take you home; she says she'll wait.

HEYTHORP. Deuce she is! Devil to pay!

FARNEY. And Mr. Joseph Pillin has just come in.

HEYTHORP. [*Sinking into his chair*] Bring him here! Don't want to be disturbed.

FARNEY. Very good, Sir.

He waits for JOSEPH PILLIN *to enter; then crosses and goes out into the inner office.* JOSEPH PILLIN *is a parchmenty, precise, thin, nervous man, with slight grey whiskering, between seventy and eighty, in a fur coat and top hat.*

JOE PILLIN. [*In his rather quavering voice*] Well, Sylvanus, I had your message.

HEYTHORP. Um, Joe! Have a cigar. [*He puts one in his own mouth, and lights it.*]

JOE PILLIN. Cigar! You know I never smoke them. You've a monstrous constitution, Sylvanus. If I drank port and smoked cigars, I should be in my grave in a fortnight. I'm getting old—growing nervous——

HEYTHORP. Always were as scary as an old hen, Joe. Sit down.

JOE PILLIN. Well, my nature's not like yours. About my ships. What news have you? I'm getting anxious. I want to retire. Freights are very depressed. I don't think they'll recover in my time. I've got my family to think of.

HEYTHORP. Crack on sail and go broke—buck you up like anything.

JOE PILLIN. Now, Sylvanus! You make a joke of everything. I'm quite serious.

HEYTHORP. Never knew you anything else, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. Hasn't your Board decided to-day? The sixty thousand I'm asking is a very small price for four good ships.

OLD HEYTHORP *looks at him deeply, twinkles, and blows a puff of smoke.*

Well, Sylvanus?

HEYTHORP. Make it worth my while, Joe, or it won't go through.

JOE PILLIN. Worth your while? [*Bending forward and lowering his voice*] How do you mean—a commission? You could never disclose it.

HEYTHORP. Who wants to? I'll get you sixty thousand for your ships if you'll give me ten per cent. of it. If you don't—deal's off, Joe—not a brass rap.

JOE PILLIN. But it means coming down six thousand in my price.

HEYTHORP. Well, try elsewhere.

JOE PILLIN. But I have. There's no market at all.

HEYTHORP. Then take my offer.

JOE PILLIN. My dear Sylvanus—that's—that's positively cynical. A commission—it's not legal.

HEYTHORP. Not going to take a penny piece myself. I want you to settle it on some protégées of mine.

JOE PILLIN. [*In agitation*] But it's a breach of trust! I really can't be party to a breach of trust. Suppose it came out.

HEYTHORP. Won't come out.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, yes, so you say; but you never know.

HEYTHORP. Nothing to prevent your executing a settlement on some third parties. Who's your lawyer?

JOE PILLIN. My lawyer? Scriven's my lawyer.

HEYTHORP. Well! Get him to draw up a deed poll to-morrow morning. Bring it to me here after the general meeting to-morrow afternoon. If the purchase goes through, you sign it; if it doesn't you tear it up. What stock have you got that gives 4 per cent?

JOE PILLIN. Midland Railway.

HEYTHORP. That'll do—you needn't sell, then.

JOE PILLIN. Yes; but who—who are these—these third parties?

HEYTHORP. Woman and her children—must make provision for 'em. [*At* JOE PILLIN's *expression*] Afraid of being mixed up with a woman, Joe?

JOE PILLIN. Yes, you may laugh. I *am* afraid of being mixed up with someone else's woman. I don't like it—I don't like it at all. I've not led your life, Sylvanus.

HEYTHORP. Lucky for you—been dead long ago. Tell your lawyer it's an old flame of yours—you old dog.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, there it is at once, you see. I might be subject to blackmail.

HEYTHORP. Tell him to keep your name dark and just pay over the income quarterly.

JOE PILLIN. [*Rising*] I don't like it, Sylvanus—I don't really.

HEYTHORP. Then leave it and be hanged to you! But there'll be no deal, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. Is there no other way?

HEYTHORP. No. Matter must be settled to-morrow. And if I don't pitch it strong to the shareholders, the sale won't go through, that's flat.

JOE PILLIN. It's playing round the law, Sylvanus.

HEYTHORP. No law to prevent you doing what you like with your money. Taking nothing myself—not a mag. You assist the fatherless and widowed—just your line, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. What a fellow you are, Sylvanus! You don't seem capable of taking anything seriously.

HEYTHORP. Care killed the cat. Well?

JOE PILLIN. No, I—I don't think I can do it. Besides, such a sacrifice—six thousand pounds.

HEYTHORP. Very well! Get another bid if you can—freights'll go lower yet.

JOE PILLIN. Oh! do you think so?

HEYTHORP. Sure of it.

JOE PILLIN. Very well, Sylvanus, very well! I suppose I must.

HEYTHORP. Here's the name for your lawyer. Write it down.

[JOE PILLIN *writes.*

Rosamund Larne—with an "e"—23 Millicent Villas, Liverpool, widow of Philip Larne, late of Dublin, barrister-at-law; income to her, until her children, Phyllis Larne and John Larne, attain the

age of twenty-one or marry, then to said Phyllis and said John Larne in equal shares for life, remainder to their children. Got that? Get it drawn to-morrow morning.

JOE PILLIN. [*Raising himself*] It seems to me very irregular—very risky.

HEYTHORP. Go home and drink a bottle of champagne on it. Good-night, Joe. No deed, no deal! I'll trust you.

JOE PILLIN. Well, good-night, Sylvanus, good-night. You always were a dare-devil. [*He quavers to the door of the outer office*] Good-night.

[*He passes out.*

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] He'll jump. Better than beggary for 'em. [*He sits back with a smile. Then closes his eyes as if in sleep.*]

The door back Left is reopened and ADELA HEYTHORP, *his daughter, comes in; a woman of thirty-two, with dark hair and thin, straight face and figure. She stands just in the room regarding him severely.*

ADELA. You really ought not to be so late, Father. It's most dangerous at this time of year. Are you ready, now?

HEYTHORP. [*Opening his eyes*] No.

ADELA. It's really terrible the way you neglect your health. I've noticed that every time you drink port, you do something dangerous the next day. In weather like this you ought always to get back

before dark. And of course you eat much too much. One would think you were forty, instead of over eighty.

HEYTHORP. Not if they saw you.

ADELA. Really, Father, is that your idea of repartee? Who were your visitors?

HEYTHORP. Ladies and a boy.

ADELA. So I saw. They came to the house first. I know their name is Larne, but it conveyed nothing to me.

HEYTHORP. [*With a grin*] My daughter-in-law, and my grandchildren; that's all.

ADELA. That isn't a bit funny, either.

HEYTHORP. No, it's gospel truth.

ADELA. Then do you mean to say you were married before you married my mother?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. Not married! I see. I suppose these people are hanging round your neck, then. I begin to understand your difficulties. Are there any more of them?

Old HEYTHORP *makes a violent and ineffectual effort to rise.*

You'll hurt yourself. [*Seeing him motionless again*] I suppose you don't realise that it's not an agreeable discovery. I don't know what to think——

HEYTHORP. Think what you like.

ADELA. Are you coming?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. I can't keep this carriage any longer. You'll be late for dinner.

HEYTHORP. Dine in my own room in future. Tell Meller.

ADELA. I don't see why *you* should lose your temper.

HEYTHORP. Because I can't get up, you think you can stand there and worry me.

ADELA. Well, really, I've come especially to fetch you home, and you call it worrying.

HEYTHORP. Paddle my own canoe, thank you.

[ADELA *turns and goes out.*

[*To himself*] Self-righteous cat! [*He makes a slow and considered effort to rise, but fails, and sits motionless. He raps the table with a pen. There is no result. Reaching for an inkpot, he rams it on the table twice.*]

[TWO YOUNG CLERKS *appear at the door, Right.*

HEYTHORP. You young gentlemen had forgotten me.

FIRST CLERK. Mr. Farney said you didn't want to be disturbed, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Give me my hat and coat.

SECOND CLERK. Yes, Sir.

They come, raise him, and help him into hat and coat.

HEYTHORP. Thank you. That carriage gone?

FIRST CLERK. [*Crossing to window and looking out*] Yes, Sir.

HEYTHORP. All right. Tell Mr. Farney to come and see me at noon, about my speech for the general meeting to-morrow.

FIRST CLERK. Yes, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Good-night to you.

CLERKS. Good-night, Sir.

He passes like a tortoise to the door, Back, opens it feebly, and goes out.

FIRST CLERK. Poor old Chairman, he's on his last.

SECOND CLERK. Gosh! He's a tough old hulk—he'll go down fighting. [*Raising the window*] There he goes—slow as a barnacle. He's held the whole street up. Look—under the lamp! [*The* FIRST CLERK *joins him at the window*] I say—that was a near thing—that cart!

FIRST CLERK. He doesn't give a damn for anything.

SECOND CLERK. He's got his tram all right.

FIRST CLERK. See him raising his hat to that old woman—you'd think he'd got all night before him.

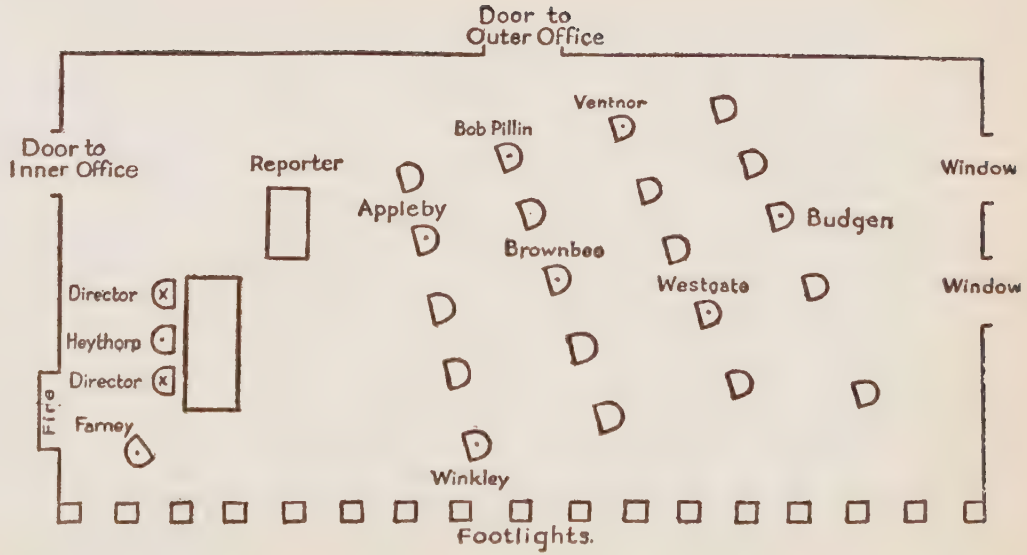
SECOND CLERK. Old school—what!

FIRST CLERK. He's got pluck, and he's got manners. Good "Old English!"

SECOND CLERK. There they go! Ting-a-ling!

[*He shuts the window down.*

THE CURTAIN IS LOWERED FOR A MINUTE.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Brownbee
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Westgate
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Farney
Fire
Winkley
Footlights.

SCENE II

The same, converted to the purposes of the General Meeting. The three chairs back to the fire, on the Right, are those of Old Heythorp *and two fellow-Directors, of whom the first is on his feet.* Farney *stands by the Chairman, a little back of him. Facing them are four rows of five chairs each, with fourteen seated* Shareholders. *At a small table, on the far Left, is a* Reporter. Old Heythorp *is finishing his Chairman's speech.*

Heythorp. Come to this arrangement with Messrs. Pillin—owners of the four steamships, *Smyrna, Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon*— [*His voice is failing*] —vessels in prime condition. . . .

Mr. Budgen] (a Shareholder). [*From the back*] Excuse me, Sir, we can't hear a word down here.

Heythorp. With a total freight-carrying capacity of fifteen thousand tons.

[Three Shareholders *rise.*

Mr. Budgen. We might as well go home. If the Chairman's got no voice, can't somebody read for him?

Old Heythorp *takes a sip of water and goes on, a little louder.*

Heythorp. At the low inclusive price of £60,000. Gentlemen, *Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*

SHAREHOLDER. Can't hear a word.

OLD HEYTHORP *hands his speech to* FARNEY *and sinks into his seat.*

FARNEY. The Chairman has just said, "*Vestigia nulla retrorsum.*"

MR. BUDGEN. Yes, very convincing.

FARNEY. [*Reading*] "Times are bad, but they are touching bottom. I have said freights will go up. This is the moment for a forward stroke. With the utmost confidence we recommend your ratification of this purchase, which we believe will soon substantially increase the profits of the Company."

FARNEY *sits down and glances at* OLD HEYTHORP, *who nods to the* DIRECTOR *on his left.*

DIRECTOR. [*Rising and combing his beard with his fingers*] Before moving the adoption of the Report, we welcome any comment from shareholders.

[*He sits down.*

TWO SHAREHOLDERS, *one in the second, one in the third row, rise.* OLD HEYTHORP *nods at the one in the second row.*

FARNEY. Mr. Brownbee.

MR. BROWNBEE. I should like, if I may be allowed, to congratulate the Board on having piloted our ship so smoothly through the troublous waters of the past year. ("Hear, hear!") With our worthy Chairman still at the helm, I have no doubt that, in spite of the still low, I might even say falling barometer, and the—er—unseasonable climacteric, we may rely on weathering the—er—storm. I confess

that the present dividend of 4 per cent. is not one which satisfies—er—every aspiration; ("Hear, hear!") but speaking for myself, and I hope for others, [*He looks round*] I recognise that in all the circumstances it is as much as we have the right to expect. ("No, no.") It is very gratifying to have these ample reserves; and by following the bold, but to my mind prudent, development which the Board proposes to make, we may reasonably, if not sanguinely, expect a more golden future. ("No, no!") A shareholder keeps on saying, "No, no" —from that lack of confidence I should like to dissociate myself. Our Chairman, whose strategic wisdom has been proved on many a field, would not so strongly advocate the purchase of these Pillin ships without good reason. He well said "*Vestigia nulla retrorium.*" I venture to think there can be no better motto for Englishmen. Ahem! Ahem!

[*He sits down.*

The other SHAREHOLDER *rises again.* OLD HEYTHORP *nods at him.*

FARNEY. Mr. Westgate.

MR. WESTGATE. [*A breezy fellow*] I want to know much more about this proposition to purchase these ships. I doubt its wisdom; I very much doubt it. To whom was the proposal first made?

HEYTHORP. To me, Sir.

MR. WESTGATE. The Chairman says to him. Very well! But what I want to know is why are Pillins sellin', if freights are to go up as the Chairman prophesies.

HEYTHORP. Matter of opinion.

MR. WESTGATE. Quite so. And in my opinion they're goin' lower; and Pillins are right to sell. If that's so, we're wrong to buy. ("Hear, hear!") ("No, no!") Pillins are shrewd people.

HEYTHORP. They're rattled.

MR. WESTGATE. Business men! Rattled! I wonder what young Mr. Pillin there says to that.

BOB PILLIN. Er, I'm not in—er—a position to—er—state.

MR. WESTGATE. Well, that's not very conclusive. Perhaps you'll say I'm rattled too. [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*] Well, rattled or not, I think it's a rash purchase in times like these. We're in the trough of the sea.

HEYTHORP. Always buy at the bottom of the market.

MR. WESTGATE. And who's to tell we're there? We're losin' our trade hand over hand. The Germans are buildin' us out o' house and home; and the Yanks are goin' ahead like the very devil.

HEYTHORP. The Old Country's sound enough.

MR. WESTGATE. Well, I can see no signs of it.

[A SHAREHOLDER *in the front row rises.*

FARNEY. Mr. Winkley.

MR. WINKLEY. [*Lean and cautious*] I agree, Sir, with Mr. Westgate. I can see nothing in the present condition of shipping which calls for confidence. We are not a large company, and this proposed purchase will absorb at least two-thirds of our reserves. Beyond the dictum of the Chairman that freights will go up this year, where is the argument in favour of depleting ourselves in this way? I deprecate the proposal.

HEYTHORP. Any other shareholder anything to say before I put the Report to the meeting?

MR. BUDGEN. [*Rising*] Yes, Sir. Mr. Westgate requires answering.

FARNEY. Name, please?

SHAREHOLDER. Budgen.

HEYTHORP. Mr. Budgen.

MR. BUDGEN. I don't like this business either. I don't impute anything to anybody, but I don't like the short notice we've 'ad, nor the way the thing's pressed on us. Not only that, but, to say truth, I'm not satisfied to be galloped over in this fashion by one who, whatever he may have been in the past, is now clearly not in his prime.

A certain sensation. OLD HEYTHORP *looks over his shoulder at* FARNEY, *who heaves him up from behind.*

HEYTHORP. [*Voice low*] My best services have been at your disposal nineteen years; my experience of shipping is a little greater than that of the three gentlemen who spoke last. [*Voice suddenly rises*] If I'm not in my prime, my brain's solid and my heart's stout. "There is a tide in the affairs of limited companies"—I'm not content to stagnate. If *you* want to stagnate, give your support to these gentlemen, and have done with it. But I repeat, freights will go up before the end of the year. The purchase is sound, more than sound—it's a dam' fine one; and I stand or fall by it. [*He sinks back into his seat.*]

A pause. Then an old pink GENTLEMAN *in the second row rises.*

FARNEY. Mr. Appleby.

MR. APPLEBY. It has been painful to me—painful—and I have no doubt to others, to hear an attack made on the Chairman. If he is old in body, he is young in mental vigour and courage. I wish we were all as young. We ought to support him, gentlemen; most certainly we ought to support him.

OLD HEYTHORP bows, and MR. APPLEBY *bows and sits down.*

VENTNOR. [*Rising*] We don't want sentiment interfering with our judgment in this matter. The question is simply: How are our pockets to be affected? I came here with some misgiving. [*In a rather queer voice*] I can't say I've lost it; but on the whole—I say on the whole—I favour the proposition. The ships are undoubtedly very cheap. We've got these reserves, and we might as well use them. [*A pause*] The Chairman knows his way about. [*He sits down.*]

HEYTHORP. Any more remarks? [*Heaved up*] Very well, I move the adoption of the Report and accounts.

MR. BROWNBEE. I second that.

HEYTHORP. Those in favour signify the same in the usual way.

Except MR. WESTGATE, MR. BUDGEN, *and one other, all hold up their hands.*

HEYTHORP. Contrary?

MR. BUDGEN *and the other hold up their hands.*

MR. WESTGATE *does not.*

HEYTHORP. Carried. Only other business, gentlemen, is the election of a director in place of Mr. Popham who retires, and offers himself for re-election.

Mr. Popham's not here to-day—indisposed. [*Voice going again*] Very valuable director. Those in favour of his re-election?

All hands are held up except MR. BROWNBEE'S *and* MR. WESTGATE'S.

Contrary? [*No hands are held up*] Carried. All the business, gentlemen.

The meeting breaks up. BOB PILLIN *is first out of the room.*

The DIRECTORS *file out into the inner office.*

The REPORTER *rises and comes to* FARNEY.

REPORTER. Name of the last speaker but one—Applepie, was it?

FARNEY. Appleby.

REPORTER. Oh! Haythorp—with an "a"?

FARNEY. "E."

REPORTER. Oh! an "e." He seems an old man. Thank you. Would you like to see a proof? With an "a" you said——?

FARNEY. "E."

REPORTER. Oh! an "e." Oh! Good afternoon!

FARNEY. [*To* MR. BROWNBEE, *who is lingering*] Fancy his not knowing how to spell the Chairman's name after all these years! What does go on inside them?

MR. BROWNBEE. Indeed, yes. The Press is very peculiar—they seem to have no—no passions. I hope I was useful, Mr. Farney. That fellow Westgate was very unpleasant.

FARNEY. Yes, Sir, he wants to come on the Board.

MR. BROWNBEE. [*Who also does*] Ah! Indeed! Ah! I see.

FARNEY. Yes, Sir; always kicks up a fuss—hopes they'll put him on to keep him quiet.

MR. BROWNBEE. Dear, dear! And will they?

FARNEY. [*With a smile*] Not while the Chairman lives, Sir. He prefers the other way—services rendered.

MR. BROWNBEE. [*Pleased*] Ah-h! Yes, I'm glad to hear that. Yes. I suppose there isn't a question of another director at the moment?

FARNEY. I believe not, Sir. But, of course, it's always the unexpected that happens.

MR. BROWNBEE. I know, I know. One must be prepared for everything. I thought that—er—well—that possibly *I*—I think the Chairman would favour me— [*Here he catches sight of Ventnor, who has approached*] But this, perhaps, isn't the moment. On the whole a pleasant meeting. Good afternoon!

He goes, FARNEY *looking after him with a smile. The room is now empty but for* VENTNOR *and* FARNEY.

VENTNOR. So *he* wants to get on the Board. The old fox! Can I see the Chairman, Mr. Farney?

Before FARNEY *can answer, a* CLERK *announces from the outer office:* "MR. PILLIN, Sir!" JOE PILLIN *enters, nipped and yellow and wrapped to the nose in a fur coat.* FARNEY *goes into the inner office.*

VENTNOR. How de do, Mr. Pillin? I know your son. So we've bought your ships. Hope they'll do

us some good. But I suppose you hope they won't, or you wouldn't have sold. One man's meat——

JOE PILLIN. Mr. Ventnor, I think? Thank you. Very cold, isn't it?

FARNEY. [*Returning: to* VENTNOR] Will you wait in here, Sir? The Chairman will see you presently.

VENTNOR *goes into the outer office, and* FARNEY *follows him, as* OLD HEYTHORP *comes in.*

JOE PILLIN. [*Quavering*] Ah! Sylvanus? Aren't you perished?

HEYTHORP. What a quavering thread-paper of a chap you are, Joe! Take off your coat.

JOE PILLIN. I? I should be lost without my fur. You must have a fire inside you.

HEYTHORP. Sound innards, nothing more.

JOE PILLIN. [*Nervously scrutinising the closed doors*] So—it's gone through, Sylvanus? It means a wretched price for me—wretched.

HEYTHORP. You may think yourself damned lucky, Joe. Brought that deed?

JOE PILLIN. [*Nervously produces a parchment and unfolds it on the little table to show his signature*] Yes. And I've—I've signed it. I don't like it—it's irrevocable. I can't bear irrevocable things. Never could. I consider you stampeded me, Sylvanus—playing on my nerves like that.

HEYTHORP. Your lawyer must think you a sad dog, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. Ah! suppose it comes to the knowledge of my wife at my death!

HEYTHORP. Nothing'll make you shiver then.

JOE PILLIN. Really! That's very bad taste, Sylvanus. Well, you've got your way, you always do. Who is this Mrs. Larne? It seems my son met them here yesterday. I thought at least nobody knew you were connected with them.

HEYTHORP. Mother of my grandchildren under the rose, Joe; and you've provided for 'em—best thing you ever did.

JOE PILLIN. [*Pocketing the deed*] Oh! I'm sorry you told me. It's worse than I thought. It's a clear breach of trust on your part—there's no question; and I'm conniving at it. As soon as the transfer of the ships is signed, I shall get away abroad. This cold's killing me. I wish you'd give me your recipe for keeping warm.

HEYTHORP. Get a new inside, and drink port.

JOE PILLIN. And yet, I suppose, with your full habit, your life hangs by a thread?

HEYTHORP. Stout one, my boy.

JOE PILLIN. Well, good-bye, Sylvanus. You're a Job's comforter. I must be getting home. I don't like it.

HEYTHORP. Then lump it.

JOE PILLIN *puts on his hat, and goes.* FARNEY *enters.*

FARNEY. Will you see Mr. Ventnor now, Sir?

[OLD HEYTHORPS *nods.* VENTNOR *enters.*

VENTNOR. Things are looking up with you, Mr. Heythorp.

OLD HEYTHORP *looks at him deeply without reply.*

Your creditors put their tails between their legs yesterday, thanks to Mr. Brownbee. And you've carried your purchase through to-day—thanks to me.

HEYTHORP. Come to your point, Sir, if you've got one.

VENTNOR. Oh! yes, I've got one. You had your way, Mr. Heythorp, but the meeting to-day might have turned very nasty. You rode roughshod; but, as you saw, I'm not the only one, by a long way, who feels that a Chairman ought to be in full possession of his faculties. If the shareholders to-day had turned you down, where would you have been?

HEYTHORP. In the soup. But they didn't.

VENTNOR. No, they just didn't. But there wasn't much in it. I could have turned the scales against you instead of for. And if they'd thrown you over, your other companies would shelve you too. Your position, Mr. Heythorp, if I may say so, is precarious, in spite of the way you carry it off.

HEYTHORP. Will you come to the point, Sir?

VENTNOR. Yes. It's this: Am I to make it more precarious?

HEYTHORP. How?

VENTNOR. By filing a petition for your bankruptcy. That would be quite enough to tip the beam.

HEYTHORP. File away!

VENTNOR. You won't pay me, then?

HEYTHORP. No.

VENTNOR. Is that wise, Mr. Heythorp—is it wise? Take time. Think it over. By the way, you put the case for that purchase very high, didn't you?

HEYTHORP. [*Looking at him steadily*] Not a bit too high. Freights have touched bottom—go up soon.

VENTNOR. D'you know what passed through my mind?

HEYTHORP. Not an idea.

VENTNOR. [*Smiling*] And you won't reconsider your refusal?

HEYTHORP. [*With rising choler*] You heard the sporting way they treated me yesterday. Let 'em down by giving you preference? Not for Joe!

VENTNOR. Mr. Heythorp, you've had your way all your life, I fancy——

HEYTHORP. Wish I had.

VENTNOR. And it's given you the idea that you can always have it. Well, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—not all the King's horses nor all the King's men—remember the old rhyme?

HEYTHORP. You're good enough to be mysterious, Sir.

VENTNOR. Once more, won't you reconsider——?

HEYTHORP. My answer's flat: I'll see you damned first.

VENTNOR. Very good, Mr. Heythorp! Very good indeed! To our next meeting, then. You've not heard the last of this. Good-day. [*He goes to the door.*]

HEYTHORP. Good-day to you!

[VENTNOR *goes out.*

HEYTHORP. [*To himself, rumbling*] That cur smells a rat. [*He moves very slowly to the inner office door and calls*] Mr. Farney!

[FARNEY *enters.*

HEYTHORP. Bring me my hat and coat.

[FARNEY *brings them.*

Get me a taxi-cab; tell the driver Millicent Villas; if he doesn't know it, let him ask.

FARNEY. Yes, Sir. [*Helping him on with his coat.*]

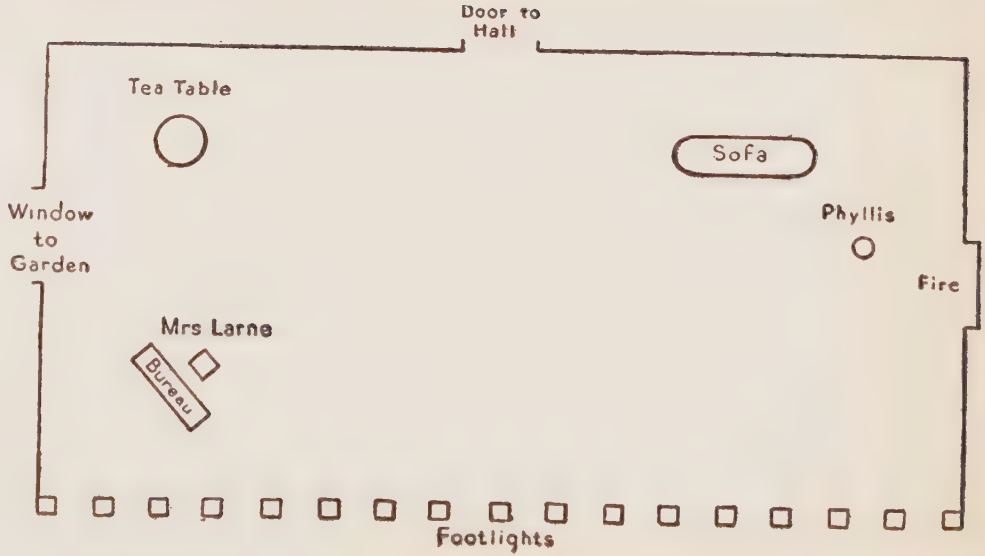
HEYTHORP. That chap Ventnor. What's his holding?

FARNEY. Nothing to speak of, Sir. Ten shares, I believe.

He goes out. OLD HEYTHORP *slowly puts on his hat.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II


Door to Hall
Tea Table
Sofa
Window to Garden
Phyllis
Fire
Mrs Larne
Bureau
Footlights

ACT II

The Larnes' small drawing-room at Millicent Villas, about three-thirty the same afternoon. A general effect of subdued disorder and chintz. A deep-cushioned sofa; a tea table with not only tea-things, but a liqueur bottle, glasses, and cigarette box on it. Water-colours by Mrs. Larne on the walls; an untidy bureau, Right. A cheerful fire, Left, and on the fender before it PHYLLIS *drying her hair. A garden window, Right. A door, Back.* MRS. LARNE, *at her bureau in a negligée, is scribbling furiously and smoking a cigarette.*

[*Enter* LETTY, *the little Maid-of-all-work.*

LETTY. [*Holding out a bill to* MRS. LARNE] Gas, ma'am. And he's goin' to cut it off to-morrer.

MRS. LARNE. [*With a puff of smoke and a gesture of despair*] That man's incorrigible!

LETTY. The water's been, again.

MRS. LARNE. [*With dignity*] Next time he comes, I'll see him, myself.

LETTY. Yes, ma'am—he ain't goin' away next time, 'e says, till you 'ave.

MRS. LARNE. Their impudence!

LETTY. Ah! 'e's a caution. Never knew such a man for not takin' no for an answer.

MRS. LARNE. [*With her laugh*] He'll take it from me, Letty.

LETTY. Yus, an' turn the water off. What for supper, please?

MRS. LARNE. Oh! something light. Use your wits.

LETTY. The cold bacon?

PHYLLIS. Ugh-h!

MRS. LARNE. [*Dreamily*] Yes! Delicious.

LETTY. There ain't nothin' else.

MRS. LARNE. [*Scribbling*] Exactly. Don't worry me.

LETTY. Laundry's comin' at six.

MRS. LARNE *continues to scribble;* PHYLLIS, *drying her hair, pays sudden attention.*

PHYLLIS. The laundry, mother. I must have my things back. I'm down to my last com.

MRS. LARNE. Tt, tt! It'll be all right. Where's Jock?

LETTY. In the kitchen, ma'am—'e's thinkin'!

MRS. LARNE. Well, don't let him. [*Impressively*] And mind! He's not to come in here. I'm expecting Mr. Pillin at half-past. Go and dress, Letty.

LETTY. 'Im with the 'igh collar—same as yesterday?

MRS. LARNE. [*With her laugh*] Gracious! What a way of putting it.

[PHYLLIS *sneezes.*

LETTY. Ain't your 'air dry, Miss?

PHYLLIS. No.

LETTY. Will you want tea, ma'am?

MRS. LARNE. [*Scribbling*] Of course!

LETTY. Shan't be able to bile no kettle to-morrer.

MRS. LARNE. Make tea while the gas burns. Run away, you awful little drumstick. I shall never get this article finished.

LETTY. I'll try and sneak one from the basket, Miss, when 'er 'ead's turned-like. She won't leave nothin' if she ain't paid this time.

[*She goes out.*

PHYLLIS. Mother!

MRS. LARNE. [*Conning*] "She had on black moiré, with teeny tucks and flounces, and a flame-coloured fillet. There was a *je ne sais quoi* in the general effect. Lady Baker, on the other hand——"

PHYLLIS. *Mother!*

MRS. LARNE. What?

PHYLLIS. That young man!

MRS. LARNE. Well, what about him?

PHYLLIS. It's horrible to borrow from people you've only seen once.

MRS. LARNE. Well! you're not going to, I hope.

PHYLLIS. No, but you are.

MRS. LARNE. Will you hold your tongue, you disrespectful gairl!

PHYLLIS. I can't, mother. I hate it!

MRS. LARNE. There it is! I slave for you children, I beg for you. I wear myself to the bone——

PHYLLIS. Mother!

MRS. LARNE. [*With a large sigh, and her hand on her ample bosom*] Well, almost—yes, I can feel one

rib. I never knew such ingratitude. "Lady Baker, on the other hand, filled the eye"—You've put it all out of my head—what did she fill the eye with? How do you think I'm to keep a roof over us?

PHYLLIS. I don't want a roof kept over me by borrowing.

MRS. LARNE. [*Sarcastically*] Oh! no. Of course not!—"filled the eye with red velvet."—There! I don't know whether it was red velvet or not. I wonder [*musing*] is "red velvet" libellous? I write this stuff—I—I—an artist—It's too hard! [*She wipes her eye with a tiny handkerchief.*]

PHYLLIS. [*Going to her*] Mother—don't! I didn't mean—only I do so loathe it. Father *was* a gentleman, wasn't he?

MRS. LARNE. I suppose you mean I'm not a lady? 'Pon my word!

PHYLLIS. Oh! Mother, I *know* you're descended from the Cornish kings. Well, I think we ought to live up to it. Look here, I'll sell my hair.

MRS. LARNE. You'll what? What d'you think you'd look like without your hair?

PHYLLIS. [*Darkly*] Like enough for *that* young man.

MRS. LARNE. I never met a gairl who said such things—never.

PHYLLIS. Well, of course, I know what he's coming for. I won't be a decoy duck, mother. If you borrow from him, I'll steal it from you, and pay it back. I will!

MRS. LARNE. Of all ungrateful little wretches!

[PHYLLIS *rubs her cheek against her mother's.* No! Go away!

PHYLLIS. Mum, don't be grumpsy!

Her mother has taken out a little mirror, and is looking at herself. PHYLLIS *takes a peep.*

PHYLLIS. [*Rubbing her own cheek*] Oh! it's come off on me.

MRS. LARNE. You little cat!

[*The front door-bell is heard to ring.* Good gracious, there he is! And look at me—look at me! [*She gathers herself up and swims to the door. Her voice is heard in the passage saying*] Don't open, Letty, till I'm invisible.

PHYLLIS *takes the little mirror to the window, for the light is failing, and rubs her cheek more vigorously. Through the open door she can hear voices.*

BOB PILLIN. Er—Mrs. Larne at home?

LETTY. Yes, Sir—but she's invisible.

BOB PILLIN. Ha'r! I'm sorry.

LETTY. Miss Phyllis is at 'ome, Sir.

BOB PILLIN. Er—her! Wonder if she'd see me?

LETTY. She's been washin' 'er 'air, but it may be dry be now. I'll see.

LETTY *enters. She is in black with an apron.*

LETTY. It's *'im*, Miss. Will you see 'im?

PHYLLIS. Oh! Gefoozlem! In a jiff.

She hands LETTY *the mirror, tears open the window, and disappears into the garden.*

LETTY. [*At the door*] Come in. She'll see you in a jiff. Oh! and Master Jock's loose, Sir.

BOB PILLIN. [*Coming in*] Is he—ah!

LETTY takes his cane from him and gives him the little mirror, looks round, takes a towel from the fender, and retires.

BOB PILLIN is beautifully dressed, with a narrow white piping round his waistcoat, a buttonhole of tuberoses, and his hat still in one hand. He stands uneasily twisting the little mirror, then lifts it and examines his face.

PHYLLIS. [*Opening the door*] Oh! Conceited young man! [*Her hair is fluffed out on her shoulders, and the sight of it is almost too much for* BOB PILLIN.]

BOB PILLIN. I say, how topping!

PHYLLIS. [*Shaking her mane*] Lawks! It's awful. Have you come to see mother?

BOB PILLIN. Er-r—yes; I'm glad she's not here, though.

PHYLLIS. Don't be foolish! Sit down! [*She sits on the sofa and taps it; he sits beside her*] Isn't washing one's head awful?

BOB PILLIN. Er—well! Of course, I haven't much experience.

PHYLLIS. I said head—not hair! [*A pause*] Why do you know such frightful men?

BOB PILLIN. What! I don't know any frightful men.

PHYLLIS. You know that man who was at Guardy's yesterday—I saw you. He's a horror.

BOB PILLIN. Ventnor—oh! Well, I only just know him. What's the matter with him?

PHYLLIS. He's mother's lawyer. Mother doesn't mind him—but I think he's a beast.

BOB PILLIN. Why? What's he done?

PHYLLIS. It isn't what he's done. It's what he'd like to do. Isn't money horrible?

BOB PILLIN. Well, I don't know, I think money's rather a good thing.

PHYLLIS. Oh! do you? Well, you'd better take care of what you've got then, or you won't have it.

BOB PILLIN. [*Staring at her*] Look here, Miss Larne —er—Phyllis—look here!

PHYLLIS. Well, I'm looking.

BOB PILLIN. Isn't there something on your mind, or—or something?

PHYLLIS. [*Shaking her mane, then looking down*] I wish mother wouldn't—I hate it. Beastly!

BOB PILLIN. Really—I mean—if there's anything you want me to do.

PHYLLIS. Yes, go away before mother comes.

BOB PILLIN. Why?

PHYLLIS. Oh! you know. You've got eyes. Why d'you think you're here?

BOB PILLIN. Really—I don't know.

PHYLLIS. [*Scanning him*] I thought you were an up-to-date young man.

BOB PILLIN. [*Modestly—settling his tie*] Well—er—I've knocked about a bit.

PHYLLIS. It hasn't knocked the bloom off, has it?

BOB PILLIN. [*Taking out his buttonhole*] Ah! I say, do have these!

PHYLLIS. [*Wrinkling her nose*] Not for worlds.

BOB PILLIN. I think you might tell me what's the matter with you.

PHYLLIS. [*Almost fiercely*] Well, I will! Can't you see what a poky street we live in? We're always hard up.

BOB PILLIN. What a beastly shame!

PHYLLIS. Nobody can come here without—disgusting! [*She turns away from him, almost in tears.*]

BOB PILLIN. I say! What is it?

PHYLLIS. Oh! if you can't see, I'm not going to tell you.

BOB PILLIN. Well, I'm damned!

PHYLLIS. [*Glancing through her lashes*] That's better!

BOB PILLIN. Look here! Er—Phyllis! I came here to see *you*.

PHYLLIS. [*Nodding, gravely*] Exactly!

BOB PILLIN. Do you object—really—I wouldn't for the world do anything you don't like.

PHYLLIS. Then you'd better go, or you will. [*She sneezes*] My hair isn't a bit dry. [*She sits on the fender again before the fire*] Well! Aren't you going?

BOB PILLIN. You don't really mean it, do you? [*He breathes with rising emotion.*]

PHYLLIS. [*After a pause*] Oh! don't breathe so loud!

BOB PILLIN. [*Indignant*] Breathe! I wasn't breathing.

PHYLLIS. You were.

BOB PILLIN. I wasn't—— Well, I can stand anything from you. You see I've taken the knock.

PHYLLIS. What! Where?

BOB PILLIN. [*Touching his breast pocket*] Here.

PHYLLIS. Oh! Does it hurt?

BOB PILLIN. Yes, awfully. It kept me awake all last night.

PHYLLIS. That's why you look so woolly.

BOB PILLIN. You're making it rather hard for me, aren't you? You see I've seen a good deal of—er—life.

PHYLLIS. Oh! *Do* tell me!

BOB PILLIN. Well, er—no—I think—not.

PHYLLIS. That's mean.

BOB PILLIN. What I meant was that—er—seeing—er—you is so different. I mean it's like—er—going out of a—er—into a—er.

PHYLLIS. [*Softly*] Poor young man!

BOB PILLIN. Look here! What I came to say chiefly was: Will you all come to the theatre with me tomorrow night? I've got a box.

PHYLLIS. [*Jumping up and clapping her hands*] What larks! We jolly well will! That is, if—I say, d'you mind—I *must* just go and see that my white petticoat. [*Stops at the door*] You see, the laundress is an awful beast. She *will* be paid.

[*She runs out.*

BOB PILLIN *waits ecstatically. It is not* PHYLLIS, *however, who comes back, but* MRS. LARNE, *richly attired, and breathing perfume.*

MRS. LARNE. [*Greeting him*] Ah! Has my naughty gairl been making you comfortable, Mr. Pillin?

BOB PILLIN. Ha'r! Oh! Quite.

MRS. LARNE. Do you really want us to go to the theatre to-morrow? How nice of you! I should have loved it, but—[*Motioning him to the sofa*] Come and sit down. We poor Bohemians, my dear young man, you can't conceive how we live from hand to mouth. Just imagine—that poor gairl of mine hasn't anything to go in. D'you know, I simply don't know where to turn. [*With a heavy sigh*] An artist can't be business-like, and put by for this, that, and the other. And they take such advantage of one. You know those Midland Syndicate people— No, of course you don't —you're one of those rich young men who own ships and things, aren't you?

BOB PILLIN. Well, my father does—as a matter of fact, we've just sold our ships.

MRS. LARNE. How delightful! What a lovely lot of money you must have! [*Absent-mindedly taking his hand and putting it to her head and heart*] *My* poor ships are all here and here, and they don't sell—isn't it tragic? And that gairl of mine absolutely adores the theatre. If I only had the price of a dress for her on me, as the dear old cabbies say. Of course *I* should be in rags, myself. And in a box—everybody sees you. Still, you wouldn't mind that. But my lovely gairl—because she is lovely, isn't she?

BOB PILLIN. [*More and more hypnotised*] But I say, you know, if it's only that——

MRS. LARNE. *Only!* If you knew how rich that

sounds! I can't bear money—it's in my blood, I suppose. And yet, you know, every day I find it more and more impossible to live without it.

BOB PILLIN. But, Mrs. Larne—look here—you know, I mean—what's money? [*He dives his hands into his breast pocket.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*Apparently oblivious*] You see, I never can help paying my debts. It's almost a disease with me; hereditary. [*Watching out of the corner of her eye the slow, mesmerised appearance of a cheque-book*] My dear young man, whatever's that?

BOB PILLIN. Oh!—er—I thought perhaps—but of course, if you——

MRS. LARNE. If you only knew what it was to see a cheque-book with so many cheques in it! It gives me the most perfect feeling, here. [*She lays her hand on her heart.*]

BOB PILLIN. Then won't you let me—er——

But during the foregoing PHYLLIS *has softly opened the door, Back, and appears, pushing* JOCK *before her. He ducks and creeps on hands and feet to the sofa; then raises himself suddenly till his face appears over the top like a full moon between his mother and* BOB PILLIN. BOB PILLIN *drops the cheque-book and his mouth falls open.* MRS. LARNE *clasps her bosom.*

MRS. LARNE. You awful boy! How dare you?

She turns and sees PHYLLIS. BOB PILLIN *also turns, and sheepishly pockets the cheque-book.* PHYLLIS *comes circling round to the*

fire and stands with her back to it, eyeing them. MRS. LARNE *has nipped* JOCK *by the ear.*

MRS. LARNE. This boy of mine will be the death of us, Mr. Pillin.

JOCK. I say—that hurts!

MRS. LARNE. [*Smoothly*] I mean it to.

PHYLLIS. [*Meaningly*] Mother, *I* put him up to it.

MRS. LARNE. [*Releasing* JOCK, *and with a gesture of despair*] Well, I give it up. When I'm dead of work and anxiety, you'll both be sorry. [*To* BOB PILLIN] Are we going to have supper before or after, Mr. Pillin?

BOB PILLIN. Oh!—er—both—don't you think? Er—her!

JOCK. I say, you are a topper! Have some toffee? [*He holds out a substance.*]

PHYLLIS. Look out, young man; it looks exactly like, but it's beeswax.

BOB PILLIN. [*Gazing at it*] Oh! I say!

JOCK *jabs it promptly into his opened mouth, and flies. He is met at the door, however, by* LETTY.

LETTY. Mr. Aesop.

OLD HEYTHORP, *slow as fate, in his overcoat, hat in hand, advances into the room, and the boy* JOCK *backs before him, bowing low, as to an idol.* MRS. LARNE *hastens to greet him,* PHYLLIS *too.* BOB PILLIN, *risen, is removing beeswax.*

LETTY. [*Sotto voce*] Kettle's bilin'.

MRS. LARNE. [*Majestically*] Tea, Letty.

They settle OLD HEYTHORP *on the sofa, whence he stares up at* BOB PILLIN, *and gives him a curt nod.*

BOB PILLIN. How are you, Sir? Saw you at the meeting.

HEYTHORP. How did *you* come here?

BOB PILLIN. [*Disconcerted*] Oh!—er—just dropped in.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy dear, you *must* try our new liqueur. Jock, get Guardy a glass.

The boy JOCK, *having put a glass to his eye, fills it rapidly.*

MRS. LARNE. You horrible boy! You could see that glass has been used.

JOCK. Oh! sorry, mother. *I'll* get rid of it. [*He drinks off the liqueur.*]

MRS. LARNE. [*Laughing*] Guardy, what am I to do with him?

PHYLLIS, *who has taken* JOCK *by the ear to lead him from the room, suddenly drops him with a squeal and claps her hand to her arm. He has run a pin into her.* BOB PILLIN *hastens to her.*

MRS. LARNE. Aren't those children awful? [*Lowering her voice*] Jock takes after you terribly, Guardy. Jock, come here. Look at the shape of his head.

The boy JOCK *approaches and stands seraphically gazing at* OLD HEYTHORP. *He is seized by feigned terror and, falling on to the stool before the fire, sits there grinning and*

cross-legged with his eyes fixed on OLD HEYTHORP.

MRS. LARNE. He has absolutely no reverence. Jock, take Mr. Pillin and show him your rats. And Phyllis, do hurry up the tea, there's a dear girl.

[*At the word "Rats"* JOCK *has risen.*

JOCK. Oh! ah! Come on! They only bite if you worry them. You needn't worry them if you don't like.

BOB PILLIN, *seeing that* PHYLLIS *is leaving the room, follows* JOCK *out.*

HEYTHORP. Making up to that young pup, are you?

MRS. LARNE. He's such a nice fellow. We like him ever so. Guardy, I'm sure your coming means good news.

HEYTHORP. Settled six thousand on the children.

MRS. LARNE. Guardy! [*She becomes thoughtful*] On the children——?

HEYTHORP. Yes. *You* can't blew it, so don't try!

MRS. LARNE. How unkind! As if——!

HEYTHORP. Scriven, the lawyer, will pay you the income till they come of age or marry. Sixty pounds a quarter. Now! *Ask no questions—not a word to anyone.*

MRS. LARNE. Of course not! But—quarterly—when will the first——?

HEYTHORP. Lady Day.

MRS. LARNE. Nearly six weeks? This isn't in place of the three hundred you give us, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. No—additional.

MRS. LARNE. How sweet of you!

HEYTHORP. Humbug!

MRS. LARNE. Guardy!

HEYTHORP. About young Pillin. She mustn't be grabbed up by any fool who comes along.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! the dear gairl is *much* too young. He's quite harmless; a nice simple fellow.

HEYTHORP. Drop him! Not a word of this settlement to anyone.

MRS. LARNE. N-no, Guardy. But I am so pressed. Couldn't I have twenty-five in advance?

OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head; she throws up her hands in despair, but as* LETTY *comes in with the tea, followed by* PHYLLIS, *a thought strikes her.*

Come and give Guardy tea, Phyllis. I've forgotten something; I must just telephone.

PHYLLIS. Can't I, mother?

MRS. LARNE. No; Guardy wants you. Back in a minute.

[*She goes out behind* LETTY.

PHYLLIS. [*At the tea table*] Tea, Guardy?

[OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head.*

D'you mind if I do? I've been washing my hair, it makes you frightfully hungry. [*Uncovering a dish*] Geewhiz! Crumpets! Guardy, just one crumpet?

[OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head.*

[*Filling her mouth with a crumpet*] Scrummy! Lucky Jock didn't know. Was our Dad like Jock? Mother's always so mysterious about him. I suppose you knew *his* father well? [*She sits down beside him on the sofa.*]

HEYTHORP. Man about London in my day.

PHYLLIS. Oh! your day must have been jolly. Did you wear peg-top trousers, and Dundrearys, and ride in the Row?

[OLD HEYTHORP *nods.*

What larks! And I suppose you had lots of adventures with opera dancers and gambling? The young men are all so good now. That young man, for instance, is a perfect stick of goodness.

[OLD HEYTHORP *grunts.*

You wouldn't know how good he was unless you'd sat next him going through a tunnel. Yesterday, coming home with us, he had his waist squeezed, and he simply sat still. And then, when the tunnel ended, it was Jock, after all, not me. His face was—— Oh! ah! ha, ha! he!

OLD HEYTHORP *contemplates her charming throat, thrown back in laughter, with a sort of pride in his face.*

He likes to pretend, of course, that he's fearfully lively. He's going to take us to the theatre to-morrow night, and give us *two* suppers. Won't it be lummy? Only [*With a sigh*] I haven't anything to go in.

OLD HEYTHORP *begins to fumble in his breast pocket.*

PHYLLIS. Isn't money beastly, Guardy? If one could put out a plate over night and have just enough in the morning to use during the day!

HEYTHORP. [*Fumbling out a note and putting it in her lap*] Little present for you—buy a dress—don't tell your mother.

PHYLLIS. Ten pounds! How *lovely!* You *are* a chook. [*She throws her arms round him, and bobs her lips against his nose. Sitting back and contemplating him*] To-morrow's Valentine's Day. Guardy, you've got the grand manner. Do tell me about that Yankee. *Where* did you wing him?

HEYTHORP. At Dieppe.

PHYLLIS. No, but where *on* him?

HEYTHORP. Where he couldn't sit down afterwards.

PHYLLIS. Was he turning his back?

HEYTHORP. Side view.

PHYLLIS. Oh! Yes, of course! Why did you fight the duel?

HEYTHORP. Said old England was played out.

PHYLLIS. Fifty years ago? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*] But, she's still full of beans, isn't she?

HEYTHORP. And always will be.

PHYLLIS. That's what I think—look at Jock, for instance.

[OLD HEYTHORP *looks at her instead.*

Why d'you look at me like that, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. You're more like your father than Jock. Listen! When you come of age, you'll have a hundred and twenty a year of your own that you can't get rid of. Don't ever be persuaded into doing what you don't want. Don't marry a fool for his money. And remember: your mother's a sieve—no good giving her anything; keep what you'll get for yourself—only a pittance, you'll want it all, every mag.

PHYLLIS. Mother's a darling, really, Guardy.

HEYTHORP. H'm! I daresay. Only one thing in life matters—independence. Lose that, lose everything. Get old like me, you'll find that out. Keep your independence—only value of money. And—that young pup—'ware fools! Help me up!

PHYLLIS *helps him up and puts his hat on her own head; it comes down right over the ears.*

PHYLLIS. [*Enchanted*] Oh! Guardy! What a whopper! You *must* have a big head! They're all so small now. I shall marry someone with a head like yours. [*Pensively*] I do wonder about that young man. I bet he's got the dead rat down his back by now. And isn't it niffy! Jock was keeping it for something special. [*She wrinkles her nose and plants the hat on* OLD HEYTHORP] Why! It only just goes on. *Must* you go? I do love you to come. [*With a sudden warm impulse*] And I do love you altogether! [*She trembles up close to him.*]

HEYTHORP. [*Patting her cheek*] That's right! Be a good girl. And don't tell your mother what I've been saying. Shall enjoy my dinner to-night.

PHYLLIS. Don't you always? I always think of you having *such* a good dinner. You look like it, you know.

HEYTHORP. Got a daughter. Mustn't eat, mustn't drink! Always at me.

PHYLLIS. Oh! yes, we saw her in the distance. She looked too good for anything.

HEYTHORP. That's the trouble.

PHYLLIS. Is she married?

HEYTHORP. No.

PHYLLIS. Why not?

HEYTHORP. Too holy.

PHYLLIS. [*At the window*] I thought so—Jock's pinned it to his coat behind, and he can't tell [*Fingers pinching her nose*] where it's coming from. Oh! poor young man! Oh, well, that's all right! He's safe for to-day—nobody'll be able to go near him. They're coming in. Guardy, would you mind taking him away with you in your cab?—you can smoke a cigar, you know. I'll light it for you. [*She feels in his pockets, finds his cigar case, gives him a cigar and lights it*] There! It's a good strong cigar. [*At the window*] Oh! he's found it out. There it goes, over the wall! Thank goodness! Now, look out, smoke! [*She dives for a cigarette from the table and lights it*] Good-bye, Guardy darling, I'm off. I know that rat.

[*She sidles to the door as* BOB PILLIN *comes in.*

HEYTHORP. Give you a lift if you're going my way.

BOB PILLIN. [*Looking at* PHYLLIS] Well, Sir, I wasn't thinking of——

PHYLLIS. Oh! yes he is. Guardy; he *is*.

BOB PILLIN. [*Taken aback*] Oh! ah! Tha-anks, then.

[PHYLLIS *vanishes.*

HEYTHORP. Make the most of your opportunities, I see.

BOB PILLIN. I—I don't know what you mean, Sir. Mrs. Larne is very kind.

HEYTHORP. No doubt. Don't try and pick the flowers, that's all.

BOB PILLIN. [*With some dignity*] Are you a relative of theirs, Sir?

[OLD HEYTHORP *nods.*

I quite understand what you mean. But I should like to know what your objection to me is.

HEYTHORP. Milk-and-water masquerading as port wine.

BOB PILLIN. [*Outraged*] Awfully sorry, Sir, if you don't think I'm wild enough. Anything I can do for you in that line—be most happy. I—er—know I'm not in debt, no entanglements, got a decent income, pretty good expectations and that; but I can soon put that all right, if I'm not fit without.

HEYTHORP. [*After a silence during which he puffs sturdily*] Fatter, but no more sand than your father.

He leads out, and BOB PILLIN, *hypnotised by such very plain speech, is following, when* MRS. LARNE *enters.*

MRS. LARNE. Oh! are you going, Guardy? [HEYTHORP *nods*] And you, Mr. Pillin—we haven't half——

BOB PILLIN. Awfully sorry—find I've got to. I'll send you a line about to-morrow.

MRS. LARNE *is almost securing his lappel, when her nose apprehends something, and she refrains.* BOB PILLIN *slides out behind* OLD HEYTHORP.

MRS. LARNE. [*To herself*] Dear me! what a peculiar——! [*She wrinkles her nose, then goes to her bureau, sits down, sighs profoundly, and takes up her pen*] "With

red velvet. The gathering was brilliant in the extreme." Oh, dear! What lies the papers do tell!

[PHYLLIS *enters.*

Ah! there you are, you naughty gairl. I've just telephoned to my lawyer to come round.

PHYLLIS. That horrid man! What d'you want him for, mother?

MRS. LARNE. What do I want him for? What do I want any man for? Money—money.

PHYLLIS. I wish Jock hadn't wasted that rat. I'm sure he's a beast.

MRS. LARNE. Now, Phyllis! I won't have you call him names. He's very nice for a lawyer. If *he* can't get me some money, we shall all have to go into the workhouse. I want you to be extra sweet to him.

PHYLLIS. Well, I can't.

MRS. LARNE. Then you'd better go upstairs.

PHYLLIS. I will when he comes. If he pretends to be nice—I know what it'll mean.

MRS. LARNE. And what is that?

PHYLLIS. That you're what he calls "a fine woman." Ugh! He's a horrid man!

MRS. LARNE. Can I help it if people admire me?

PHYLLIS. Of course we all admire you. Only *that* sort of man! I'm sure he never does anything for nothing.

MRS. LARNE. You're getting very knowing. [*With some dignity*] As a matter of fact, Guardy gave me some news, and I expect to be able to—er—use it for our benefit.

PHYLLIS. Guardy told *me*, too, mother.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! What?

PHYLLIS. That I shall have some money when I come of age, and that I wasn't to give—— But, Mummy, anything I ever have of course you'll have half.

MRS. LARNE. [*Putting our her hand*] Darling, I know. But by then there won't be any Mummy—she'll have wasted away. [*She sighs heavily*] Never mind!

"La vie est brève, un peu d'amour.
Un peu de rève, et puis bonjour!"

I wonder if I could work that in! [*Takes up her pen.*]

PHYLLIS. [*Producing the ten pound note, with a sigh*] Mum! Guardy gave me this to buy a dress. Would you like it?

MRS. LARNE. [*Touched*] Ducky! No! Waste it on those wretched tradesmen? You get yourself a lovely frock.

PHYLLIS. Oh! I said you were a darling!

[*Kisses her nose.*

MRS. LARNE. Listen! I believe that's his cab. Now, Phyllis, this is a crisis, and you must help me.

PHYLLIS. [*Regarding her*] Mother, I believe you love a crisis.

MRS. LARNE. Just open the door a weeny bit.

PHYLLIS. [*Doing so*] Why?

MRS. LARNE. Hssh!

VENTNOR'S *voice without:* Mrs. Larne at home?

MRS. LARNE. [*Under her breath*] It is.

LETTY'S *voice:* Can't say yet, depends on 'oo you are.

VENTNOR'S *voice:* I think she is, young woman.

LETTY'S *voice:* Are you about the water?

MRS. LARNE. [*Under her breath*] That awful little drumstick!

VENTNOR'S *voice:* Mr. Charles Ventnor, say! Give her this card.

LETTY'S *voice:* Just wait outside the door, will yer?

MRS. LARNE, *throwing up her hands, goes to the door.*

MRS. LARNE. Oh! Is that you, Mr. Ventnor? Do come in.

[VENTNOR *appears, hat in hand.* Phyllis, dear, Mr. Ventnor.

[VENTNOR *bows smilingly,* PHYLLIS *nods.* That appalling little drumstick of mine has got water on the brain. Such a faithful little soul! We Bohemians, you know, Mr. Ventnor——

VENTNOR. Precisely!

MRS. LARNE. Do sit down. [*He sits on the sofa*] Tea?—But I'm afraid it's cold. A glass of liqueur—it's really quite nice, and rather original in the afternoon, don't you think? [*Handing him a glass*] And do smoke; we smoke everywhere. Even that naughty gairl of mine smokes.

VENTNOR. No, thanks. [*Tasting the liqueur*] Very good tipple, Mrs. Larne. I came at some little inconvenience, so perhaps—— [*He glances at* PHYLLIS.]

PHYLLIS. All right!

[*She goes out without a look back.*

MRS. LARNE. [*Sitting down on the sofa beside him*] She's so abrupt, dear child. In my young days——

VENTNOR. [*Gallantly*] Your *young* days, Mrs. Larne. And what are these? But now—what is it?

MRS. LARNE. Well, as you know, my affairs are very embarrassed; but to-day I had some splendid news. A settlement has been made upon us—perfect Godsend, Mr. Ventnor, in the nick of time. Only of course I shan't get any interest from it till Lady Day. And, you see, I simply must have fifty pounds now—so I thought you would be so kind as to advance that on the security of this interest, charging, of course, what you like. It's quite ridiculous, but to-morrow I shall be without gas or coals, and probably have my furniture seized for rates. They are so hasty and unreasonable.

VENTNOR. [*Dubiously*] Settlement?

MRS. LARNE. Yes, I receive the income quarterly till my children are of age.

VENTNOR. How much?

MRS. LARNE. Six thousand pounds.

VENTNOR. Oh! [*Pricking his ears*] Who made it?

MRS. LARNE. Ah! well—that I'm *not* supposed to tell you.

VENTNOR. Six thousand—— [*To himself*] Sixty thousand—ten per cent——!

MRS. LARNE. Oh! no, not six thousand a year—that would be too heavenly; six thousand altogether.

VENTNOR. Quite!

MRS. LARNE. You can verify everything for yourself, of course. The lawyers are Messrs. Scriven.

VENTNOR. Not Crow & Donkin?

MRS. LARNE. No, the name was Scriven. Aren't they lawyers?

VENTNOR. Oh! certainly—very good firm. Very interesting news, Mrs. Larne. I thought Crow & Donkin because— [*Suddenly looking at her*] they're old Mr. Heythorp's solicitors.

MRS. LARNE. Ah! but you see I promised not to mention any names, except of course the solicitor's. If I didn't mention him, I could hardly expect you to lend me the money, could I?

VENTNOR. Afraid I must ask you to be more frank, Mrs. Larne. Mr. Heythorp *is* your late husband's father?

MRS. LARNE. Why? How *did* you know that?

VENTNOR. When you first came to see me, you spoke of his being behind you—remember? I confess I originally had a— [*With a look*] Well! a rather more intimate theory, but that didn't tally with my enquiries in Dublin.

MRS. LARNE. [*Flattering*] What a terrible man!

VENTNOR. Ah! We lawyers, Mrs. Larne, like to know something about our clients. So "Old English" has been to see you this——

MRS. LARNE. What a nose you have!

VENTNOR. Exactly! [*Sniffing*] Cigar— not long gone!

MRS. LARNE. Wonderful! It's quite like that great criminal—Sherlock Holmes.

VENTNOR. So you want fifty pounds, Mrs. Larne.

MRS. LARNE. Unless you *could* manage to make it a hundred.

VENTNOR. First you've heard of this settlement? Scriven? [*Suddenly*] Do you know a Mr. Pillin?

MRS. LARNE. Of course, we met him yesterday while you were there! Delightful young man, so cheery.

VENTNOR. [*Slily*] Very different from his father, isn't he?

MRS. LARNE. Oh! We don't know his father. Do tell me—they're rich people, aren't they?

VENTNOR. Ye-es, warm man, old Pillin. Young Pillin's a lucky fellow—only son.

MRS. LARNE. [*Dreamily*] How right!

VENTNOR. [*Clutching his chest*] I've got it!

MRS. LARNE. Oh! have you? [*Putting out her hand*] Even if it's only fifty, it'll be my salvation.

VENTNOR. [*With a laugh*] No, no, Mrs. Larne; no, no!

MRS. LARNE. But you said you'd got it.

VENTNOR. I don't carry fifty pounds about with me. [*With a peculiar look at her*] Unless I know I've got a use for it. I must ask you to give me a little note to Scriven.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! of course. [*She goes to her bureau and writes at his dictation.*]

VENTNOR. [*Dictating*]

"DEAR SIR,—Will you be so good as to give my lawyer, Mr. Charles Ventnor, details of the settlement of six thousand pounds just made on my children and myself, that he may have record of the matter. —Yours faithfully, etc."

Just pin your card. I'll go and see them first thing to-morrow—know 'em quite well. If it's all right, you shall have the money; and I won't charge you a penny.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! but—how unusual!

VENTNOR. Not at all! Very glad to render you the little service. Hope it won't be the last. [*While she finishes writing and pins her card, he moves down to the fire, rubbing his hands; to himself, softly*] Got the old rascal! Neat—oh, neat!

MRS. LARNE [*Finishing*] There! Such a relief! [*Sniffing*] Dear me! There's that——! [*Sniffing*] You don't smell a rat, do you?

[VENTNOR *looks round at her, startled.*

It's my dreadful boy. He keeps them too long sometimes. [*Handing him the letter*] I suppose you couldn't see Scriven's to-night?

VENTNOR. [*Looking at his watch*] Too late, Mrs. Larne, I'm afraid; but if you'll add a postscript, you shall have the money by special messenger to-morrow.

[MRS. LARNE *writes at his dictation.*

VENTNOR. "I shall further be glad if you will pay Mr. Ventnor the first fifty pounds of interest when you receive it, in satisfaction of that sum advanced by him." [*Taking the letter again*] And now I must be off.

MRS. LARNE. [*Rising*] It *was* good of you to come. I feel so different. Could I have just five pounds?

VENTNOR. [*A little taken aback*] Er—well—Oh! yes, certainly.

MRS. LARNE. [*Taking the note*] How chivalrous!

VENTNOR. Not a bit, not a bit! [*He holds her hand impressively, and looks into her eyes*] You know, my dear Mrs. Larne, I am very much at your service. Your humble admirer——

While, carried away by sudden fervour and general perfume, he presses closer, the door is opened by PHYLLIS, *who stands there with* BOB PILLIN *behind her.*

And if you—if you liked, you need have no more money troubles, I assure you.

MRS. LARNE. [*Not yet aware of the door*] But how wonderful!

PHYLLIS. The laundress is here.

MRS. LARNE. Oh! how provoking! I must just see her. Good-bye, Mr. Ventnor! [*Seeing* BOB PILLIN] Why, my dear young man, I thought you'd gone!

PHYLLIS. [*With meaning*] He came back for his *stick.* [*As her mother goes, to* BOB PILLIN *in a low voice, and pointing her chin at* VENTNOR] That's your friend.

She crosses to the fire, takes BOB PILLIN'S *cane, and holds it out to him by the end.* BOB PILLIN *takes it; and suddenly, as if moved by some force outside himself, he stretches it out and taps* VENTNOR, *who is just going through the doorway, on the shoulder. The latter turns sharply.* PHYLLIS *is at the fire glaring at him.* BOB PILLIN *is consulting her eyes.*

BOB PILLIN. Hold on a minute!

VENTNOR. What's that?

BOB PILLIN. How's Mrs. Ventnor to-day?

VENTNOR. [*Sullenly*] Perfectly well.

BOB PILLIN. [*Gazing at* PHYLLIS *and still moved by her face*] It's a bit thick!

VENTNOR. It's what?

BOB PILLIN. [*More and more moved*] Ye-es. And —er—I want an explanation, don't you know.

VENTNOR. Do you? Well, you won't get it.

[BOB PILLIN *stands nonplussed.*

PHYLLIS. [*Low*] Go on!

BOB PILLIN. I have the honour to be—er—be a —a friend here. And, look here, Ventnor, it's—it's not the conduct of a gentleman.

VENTNOR. [*Angrily*] You young——! Mind your own business, will you?

BOB PILLIN. I'm going to.

PHYLLIS. Good!

BOB PILLIN. And I won't have it. It's not the thing.

VENTNOR. You—you won't have it! *In*deed! Now I tell you what, you'd better not exasperate me, you [*Glancing angrily from* BOB *to* PHYLLIS] moonstruck young calf!

BOB PILLIN. [*With real resolution*] Phyllis, shall I shift him?

PHYLLIS. Yes.

BOB PILLIN. Clear, Ventnor! And don't come again.

VENTNOR. By George! The impudence! I'll bring the whole pack of cards about your ears, young cock!

BOB PILLIN. Out! [*Advancing on him*] Going? Once—twice—for the last time——!

VENTNOR. [*Goes, turning in the doorway*] You wait and see which boot the leg is on!

[BOB PILLIN *closes the door.*

BOB PILLIN. Phew! What a scorcher!

PHYLLIS. [*Impulsively giving him her hand*] You've got ever so much more sand than I thought.

BOB PILLIN. [*Humbly*] Might I—I kiss it?

PHYLLIS. All right. It's generally dirty.

[BOB PILLIN *kisses it.*

[*Drawing it away*] Mother hated it. Beastly man—you do understand that mother hated it!

BOB PILLIN. Of course! *Of course!*

PHYLLIS. But you'd better go before she comes.

BOB PILLIN. [*Blankly*] Well, I suppose I must go some time. I couldn't— [*Approaching her face*] Could I?

PHYLLIS. No.

BOB PILLIN. Well, I mean to say that—er—I shall dream about it.

PHYLLIS. I don't mind. Ta-ta!

She waves her hand. He backs hypnotized towards the door and vanishes. PHYLLIS *turns to the fire, with a sneeze, and runs her hands through her hair.*

MRS. LARNE. [*Entering*] Well, that's that! The impudent woman took it nearly all.

PHYLLIS. Has she left my white petticoat, Mother, and my——

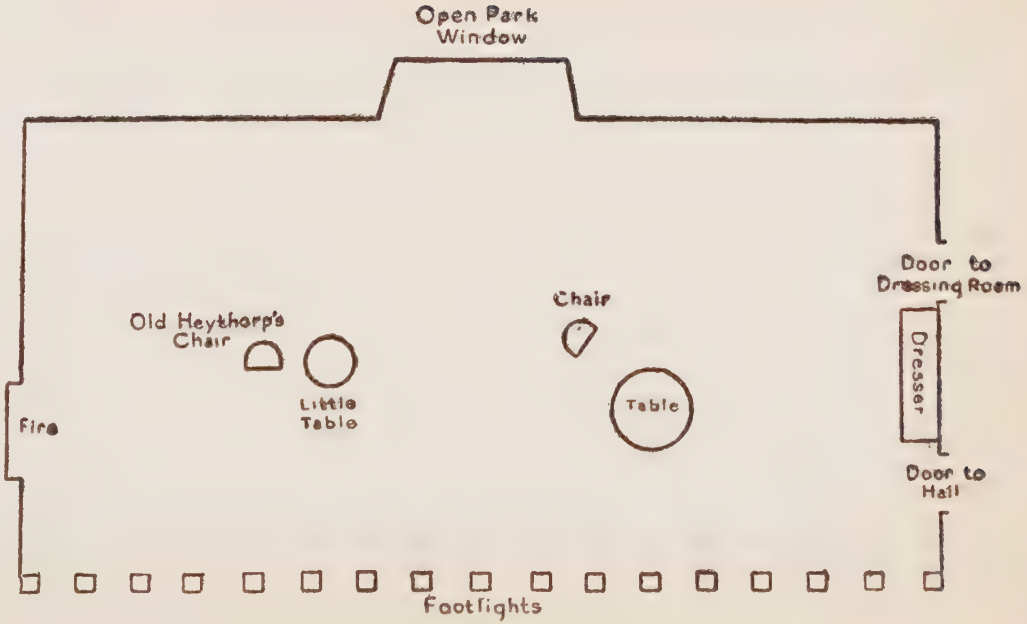
MRS. LARNE. Everything. [*Sitting at her bureau*] Have they gone?

PHYLLIS. Um!

MRS. LARNE. [*Considering*] "La vie est brève, un peu d'amour." Life is brief, a little love! Perhaps it *is* a bit cynical for the *Liverpool Pilot*.

CURTAIN.

ACT III


Open Park Window
Door to Dressing Room
Chair
Old Heythorp's Chair
Dresser
Little Table
Table
Fire
Door to Hall
Footlights

ACT III

SCENE I

OLD HEYTHORP'S *sanctum in his daughter's house—a cosy room, with oil paintings, deep armchairs, and red curtains.* OLD HEYTHORP, *in a plum-coloured velvet smoking jacket, is sitting before the log fire, Right, reading the "Morning Post." On a little table, close to him, is a reading lamp, a bell, and a card. A little pink letter has dropped to the floor. There are two doors on the Left—one to the hall, one to his bedroom—and a window at the back looking over an open space with trees. It is about five in the afternoon.*

The door is opened quietly and ADELA HEYTHORP *comes in.*

ADELA. Well, Father, are you going to keep to that absurd idea of dining here in future—giving twice the trouble?

OLD HEYTHORP *looks round at her with the white hairs on his lower lip bristling.*

I'm going out to-night: I shall have something light early, so it doesn't matter—but I do hope by to-morrow you'll feel more sociable. It *looks* so bad.

OLD HEYTHORP *resumes his paper. She takes*

up the card from the little table. It is large and has a naked Cupid.

ADELA. Cupid! With nothing on—not even a quiver. [*Reading*] "To be your Valentine." [*She picks up the little pink letter and reads, ironically*]

"DEAREST GUARDY,—I'm sorry this is such a mangy valentine. I stayed in bed for breakfast because I've got a cold coming, so I asked Jock, and the pig bought this. I'm going to get a scrummy dress this afternoon. I'm frightfully excited about the theatre to-night. It's simply ripping. Just going to have rum and honey for my cold. Good-bye.

"Your Phyllis."

So they don't call you grandfather! I'm afraid I feel relieved.

HEYTHORP. [*Very angry*] Be so good as to leave my letters alone!

ADELA. Now, Father, please don't get into a rage. [*Smelling at the valentine*] Patchouli!

HEYTHORP. How I ever had you for a daughter—why I ever put you in the position you are!

ADELA. Did my mother know about—this sort of thing?

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. How fortunate!

HEYTHORP. She could have stood it.

ADELA. Is that a sneer or a statement?

HEYTHORP. Your mother was as hard as wood—just like you.

ADELA. Really, Father, they tell me you have the manners of the old school—where do you keep them?

HEYTHORP. Well, you put my back up.

ADELA. I'm sorry. Are you going to Bath, as Dr. Somers wants.

HEYTHORP. No.

ADELA. Are you going, at least, to stop drinking port?

HEYTHORP. No! *Carpe diem*—live while I can.

ADELA. You know that any day you might have apoplexy!

HEYTHORP. Sooner have done with it than turn teetotaller!

ADELA. There's only one word for it—pagan. If you can't think of this life, you might of the next.

HEYTHORP. When they're roasting me, you'll be able to say "I told you so."

[*He rings the bell.*

ADELA. Profanity, as usual!

HEYTHORP. Let me alone, then.

ADELA. As if I could.

As she goes out, MELLER, *the valet, a discreet, clean-shaven man, comes in.*

MELLER. Would you like a hand up, Sir?

HEYTHORP. No! Tell cook I shall want a good dinner to-night.

MELLER. I will, Sir.

HEYTHORP. And get up a bottle of the '68 port.

MELLER. [*Dubiously*] Yes, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Send me Molly.

MELLER. Just come, Sir, by hand.

[*Hands him a note, and goes out.*

OLD HEYTHORP, *after scrutinising the note, as one does those which suggest the unpleasant, is about to open it, when the housemaid* MOLLY *comes in—a grey-eyed, dark-haired Irish damsel, who stands, pretty to look at, with her hands folded, her head a little to one side, her lips a little parted.*

MOLLY. Yes, Sirr?

HEYTHORP. Want to look at you.

MOLLY. Oh! I'm not tidy, Sirr. [*Puts her hands to her hair.*]

HEYTHORP. Like pretty faces. Can't bear sour ones. Had a valentine?

MOLLY. No, Sirr. Who would send me one, then?

HEYTHORP. Not got a young man?

MOLLY. Well, I might. But he's over in my counthry.

HEYTHORP. [*Holding out the valentine*] What do you think of this?

MOLLY. [*Scrutinising the card reverently*] Indeed, an' ut's pretty, too.

HEYTHORP. Like to keep it?

MOLLY. Oh! if 'tis not takin' ut from you, Sirr.

HEYTHORP. [*Fumbling out a coin*] Little present for you.

MOLLY. [*Gasping*] Oh! Sirr, a sovereign—ut's too much; 'tis kingly.

HEYTHORP. Going to ask you to do something as a human being.

MOLLY. Shure an' I will do annything you like.

HEYTHORP. Then put your nose in here every now and then—can't get up without a hand—don't like ringing—can't bear feeling dependent. Understand me?

MOLLY. Och! an' I *do*. And you so active in your brain, and such a grand gentleman. 'Tis an honour, ut is. I'll be puttin' me nose in all the time, I will.

HEYTHORP. [*With a little courtly bow*] Much obliged to you.

MOLLY. Would you be afther wantin' annything now, Sirr? Could I be pullin' you on your feet, or anny thrifle?

HEYTHORP. No, thank you. You're a good girl.

MOLLY. 'Tis proud ye make me, Sirr.

HEYTHORP. Tell me. Have I got bad manners?

MOLLY. Oh! Sir, no. 'Tis lovely manners ye have —the rale old manners.

HEYTHORP. When I was young I was fond of an Irish girl.

MOLLY. An' wouldn't that be the pleasure of her!

HEYTHORP. Blarney! No. I didn't know my luck.

MOLLY. Ah! the luck—'tis a chancey thing.

HEYTHORP. Yes. If you ever get any—stick to it.

MOLLY. I will that. Could I be bringin' you your tay, or a bottle, or annything?

HEYTHORP. No, thank you.

[*She goes out.*

HEYTHORP. [*He fumbles the letter open and reads*

it; drops his hand, and sits staring before him] Ruffian!

MELLER. [*Entering*] Mr. Farney, Sir.

[*He goes out again.*

FARNEY. Good afternoon, Sir. Great change in the weather; quite spring-like. I've brought you the purchase deed to sign for the Company. Pillins' have signed already. [*He places a document before* OLD HEYTHORP, *and a stylographic pen.*]

HEYTHORP. [*After signing*] Best thing the Company ever did, Mr. Farney. Four sound ships for sixty thousand pounds. Conscience clear on that.

FARNEY. [*With enthusiasm*] I should think so, Sir. A great stroke of business, I feel.

HEYTHORP. Heard from a shareholder called Ventnor?

FARNEY. No, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Well, I have. You may get a letter that'll make you open your eyes. Just write for me, will you?

"*Feb.* 14.

"CHARLES VENTNOR, Esq.,

"12 Fawcitt Street, Liverpool.

"SIR,—I have your letter of even date, the contents of which I fail to understand. My solicitors will be informed of it.

"Yours truly——"

[*He signs.*

FARNEY. [*All eyes*] Can *I* do anything for you, Sir?

HEYTHORP. Get straight back to the office and drop that on him as you go—impudent ruffian!

FARNEY. Might I ask what he——?

HEYTHORP. [*Shaking his head*] My letter'll bring him round here, if I'm not mistaken.

FARNEY. I take this opportunity of saying, Sir, how much I've admired the way you got this purchase through, in spite of all the opposition. In fact, Sir, in the office we all swear by you.

HEYTHORP. [*With his little bow*] Thank you, Mr. Farney—pleasure to hear that.

FARNEY. The way you rallied your voice for that last speech. Such pluck, Sir. I don't know if you ever heard your nickname in Liverpool, "Old English"? Personally I think it's a proud one.

HEYTHORP. "Æquam memento," Mr. Farney, "rebus in arduis servare mentem." Pronounce Horace like foreigners now, don't they?

FARNEY. I believe they do, Sir. Of course I don't especially object to foreigners.

HEYTHORP. Don't know what they were made for —except to give trouble.

FARNEY. There isn't very much of old England left, as you remember it, I suppose, Sir.

HEYTHORP. The breed goes on; it's in the bone.

FARNEY. Yes, Sir, but there isn't much meat on it, nowadays.

[*He looks at a picture.*

HEYTHORP. Bought that after the Crimea—hung in my chambers in the Albany, before I married. Never marry, Mr. Farney—lose your independence.

FARNEY. [*With a smile*] Afraid I've lost it, Sir. Can't say I ever had much.

HEYTHORP. Only thing in life. Heel on your neck —no matter whose—better dead.

FARNEY. You must have had a good life, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Lasted out all my cronies, every man Jack of 'em—can't call Joe Pillin alive. Careful fellows, too—some. Live a bit longer, I hope. Good day to you. Give that chap my letter.

FARNEY. Good day, Sir. I hope you'll live for many years. The ship wouldn't be the same without you.

OLD HEYTHORP *cuts him off with a nod and movement of his hand, and he goes out.* OLD HEYTHORP *takes up the little pink note, muttering.*

HEYTHORP. Fond of me—worth the risk.

[MELLER *enters with a bunch of hyacinths.*

MELLER. A young lady's brought these, Sir. A Miss Larne.

HEYTHORP. Where?

MELLER. In the hall.

HEYTHORP. Tell her to come in.

MELLER. Shall I put them in water, Sir? Very partial to water—the 'yacinth.

HEYTHORP. Smell 'em first—the dam teetotallers.

[*He takes a long sniff.*

Then MELLER *takes them out, and* PHYLLIS *comes in.*

PHYLLIS. I've bought my dress, Guardy! It's a

oner. I won't kiss you because of my cold. We're going to the "Mikado." Fancy! I've never seen it. Do you like hyacinths?

HEYTHORP. Favourite scent.

PHYLLIS. Oh! what luck! Somehow I thought you would. This is a jolly room. It's got all your lar-es and penat-es, I suppose?

HEYTHORP. Lārēs et penātēs.

PHYLLIS. Oh! I just read it, you know—in a novel. D'you like novels, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. Never read 'em.

PHYLLIS. Ah! but you've had real adventures of your own. Adventures must be lovely.

HEYTHORP. Not for young ladies.

PHYLLIS. I don't care a bit for mother's stories. There's always a baronet. And they're pretty steep.

HEYTHORP. Steep?

PHYLLIS. Hideously good and strong. You know, Guardy, you can't love anyone who isn't a little bad. *You* never were too good, I'm sure.

HEYTHORP. Human being.

PHYLLIS. That means you had some jolly go's.

HEYTHORP. Come here!

PHYLLIS. My cold, Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Don't catch colds—my age—haven't time. Enjoy yourself, but remember—world's hard; lots of ruffians always on the look-out.

PHYLLIS. I know. There's a man comes to see mother. He makes me squirm. We had rather larks with him, though, yesterday after you'd gone.

HEYTHORP. Oh?

PHYLLIS. Yes, we heard him being insulting to mother, and that young man—Guardy, he's got more sand than you think. You should have heard him say "Out you go! One, two—" and out he did go. I wish he hadn't, then Bob could have knocked him down.

HEYTHORP. Bob!

PHYLLIS. Well, that's his name. He really had quite a nice glare in his eye.

HEYTHORP. Who is this visitor fellow?

PHYLLIS. He's mother's lawyer; Ventnor he's called.

HEYTHORP. The devil he is!

PHYLLIS. Oh yes. You know him, don't you?

HEYTHORP. I do. So he came to see her yesterday! What about?

PHYLLIS. Oh! money. Guardy, I've been thinking about what you told me. It will be lovely to have money of my own. I think it's perfectly splendid of you, because I know you're not well off.

HEYTHORP. Poor as a church mouse.

PHYLLIS. [*Clasping her hands*] I adore your expressions—they're real old English. Being with you is like being in a boat—it's so breezy. And you've got such a ripping name—Sylvanus. It means made of wood, doesn't it?

HEYTHORP. Not quite. Name in my family old as the hills. When I go, it goes.

PHYLLIS. [*Clouding*] Don't, Guardy!

HEYTHORP. Can't stop Anno Domini. Never mind! Stick him up all we can. Give me a kiss.

PHYLLIS. On the top of your head only. My cold's coming back. Rum and honey only last three hours. I'm going to sneak Jock's go when I get in. Do you call that low down? He's only trying to have a cold.

HEYTHORP. Young rascal!

PHYLLIS. Do you ever have remorse, Guardy?

HEYTHORP. No.

PHYLLIS. Jock had it once—I never heard such a noise. [*She gurgles*] You see, he had a pet rabbit, and one day we had it for dinner without knowing.

HEYTHORP. Ate his pet rabbit?

PHYLLIS. His remorse didn't come from *that* exactly. You see, after we'd eaten it, we found out it wasn't his.

HEYTHORP. Stole it?

PHYLLIS. Not altogether; you see it came into the garden after a bit of lettuce he happened to be holding out, so, of course, he kept it. The owner only came round after we'd eaten it, and Jock got a frightful hiding; it was then he had his remorse. I do hope the pig'll behave to-night. We shall have awful larks, Guardy.

HEYTHORP. Remember! Bread and butter with independence better than champagne with a fool.

PHYLLIS. Yes. Only somehow I don't think Bob is a fool; I think he's just been too well brought up.

Were you ever in love, Guardy—I mean, really and truly? [HEYTHORP *nods*] Did you marry her? [HEYTHORP *shakes his head*] Why not?

HEYTHORP. [*Grimly*] Ask no questions—be told no lies.

PHYLLIS. No. Only—only—you know I *have* got a sort of feeling——

HEYTHORP. Out with it!

PHYLLIS. That—that you're our grandfather.

HEYTHORP. [*After a long stare*] Quite right! Sorry?

PHYLLIS. *Rather not!* I think it's awfully jolly. Did she die? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*] Poor Guardy! [*Cuddling*] Well, it's all the same now, isn't it? Here we are! I suppose your daughter doesn't know?

HEYTHORP. Told her yesterday. Been praying for me ever since.

PHYLLIS. M'm! I don't believe in praying for other people. I think it's cheek. Besides, things that are done are done, aren't they?

HEYTHORP. [*Nodding*] Never look back—doesn't do.

PHYLLIS. [*Switching off*] I do so wonder what you'll think of me in that dress. [*Suddenly*] I know! [*To herself*] Nobby!

[MELLER *enters with the hyacinths.*

MELLER. Mr. Joseph Pillin, Sir.

PHYLLIS. [*Awed*] Oh! Is that Bob's father?

HEYTHORP. Yes. Run along.

PHYLLIS *gives him a hasty kiss, and goes towards the door, looking curiously at* JOE

PILLIN, *who enters behind his top hat, very pale and grave.*

HEYTHORP. Well, Joe, what a death's-head you look! Sorry you sold your ships?

JOE PILLIN. [*After making sure of the door*] Who was that?

HEYTHORP. My granddaughter.

JOE PILLIN. What! One of those that I've—— Does she come here? She's very pretty.

HEYTHORP. Yes. And your son's sweet on her.

JOE PILLIN. Oh, dear! He picks up with everyone. Sylvanus, I've had a man called Ventnor to see me.

HEYTHORP. H'm! What do you make of this? [*He holds out* VENTNOR'S *letter.*]

JOE PILLIN. [*Reading*] "Certain facts having come to my knowledge, I—" what's that word?—"deem it my duty to call a special meeting of 'The Island Navigation Company' to consider circumstances in connection with the purchase of Mr. Joseph Pillin's fleet. And I give you notice that at this meeting your conduct will be called in question.—Charles Ventnor." Ah! There it is! Why did you get me to make that settlement, Sylvanus?

HEYTHORP. Natural affection, Joe.

JOE PILLIN. But that's no excuse for cheating your Company.

HEYTHORP. Didn't—cheated you; they'd agreed to the £60,000 before I saw you.

JOE PILLIN. Well, really, Sylvanus—really—an old friend! But the fact remains. It's a commission—

a breach of trust. This man asked me if I knew that Mrs. Larne. What could I say? I d-don't know her. But why did he ask?

HEYTHORP. Her lawyer—smells the rat.

JOE PILLIN. Oh, dear! oh, dear! This'll be the death of me.

[*He sits down, quite crumpled up.*

HEYTHORP. Pull yourself together, Joe. Can't touch *you;* can't upset the purchase, or the settlement. Worst comes to the worst, upset me, that's all.

JOE PILLIN. How you can sit there and look the same as ever! Are you sure they can't touch me?

HEYTHORP. Not they! Keep your pecker up and your mouth shut, and get off abroad.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, yes, I must. I'm very bad. But I don't know, I'm sure, with this hanging over me. What are you thinking of, Sylvanus? You look very funny.

HEYTHORP. [*Coming out of a sort of coma*] Thinking I'll diddle him yet.

JOE PILLIN. How are you going to do it?

HEYTHORP. Bluff the beggar out of it.

JOE PILLIN. But suppose you can't.

HEYTHORP. Buy him off; he's one of my creditors.

JOE PILLIN. You always had such nerve. Do you ever wake up between two and four, and see everything black?

HEYTHORP. Not I! Put a good stiff nightcap on, my boy.

JOE PILLIN. Yes, I sometimes wish I was less tem-

perate. But I couldn't stand it. I'm told your doctor forbids you alcohol.

HEYTHORP. He does.

JOE PILLIN. And yet you drink it. Sylvanus, do you think—if my son is sweet on this young lady, we could—we could give that as a reason for the settlement.

HEYTHORP. [*After a moment's thought, stoutly*] No! Won't have it. She's too good for him.

JOE PILLIN. Really, Sylvanus! I'm sure *I* don't want my son to marry her. I only thought it would make it more natural. We could say they were engaged, and break it off later. It would prevent——

HEYTHORP. No! Won't have her dragged in. Pay my own scot.

JOE PILLIN. But if they hold this meeting and my name gets into the papers——

HEYTHORP. Won't! Leave it to me!

JOE PILLIN. He must be stopped, Sylvanus, he really must. And you—you advise me to get off tomorrow? [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*] Well, good-bye. I can't forgive you—it was too bad, you know, too bad, altogether. All the same, I wish I had your nerve.

HEYTHORP. Poor shaky chap, you are! All to pieces at the first shot. Buck up, Joe!

He holds out his hand and JOE PILLIN *puts his quavering hand into it.*

JOE PILLIN. You won't let them, Sylvanus? You can't afford it. It would make a terrible scandal. And without the fees from your Boards, you'd be a

pauper. You'll find a way; you owe it to me, you know. Well, good-bye! I don't suppose I shall be back till the summer, if I ever come back.

[*He quavers out of the room.*

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Pauper. Dependent on that holy woman—byword and a beggar—not if I know it!

MELLER *comes in, draws the curtains, then turns up a lamp on the little table beside* OLD HEYTHORP.

MELLER. Cup of tea, Sir?

[OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head.*

HEYTHORP. Have my nap.

MELLER. Excuse me, Sir, can I go out this evening, after dinner? Miss Heythorp's going to a ball, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Ball!

MELLER. Charity ball, Sir, I believe.

HEYTHORP. Ah! it would be!

MELLER. The Mersey Temperance League, I fancy, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Good God!

MELLER. Yes, Sir. Anything else, Sir?

HEYTHORP. Nothing, thank you.

MELLER, *going to the door, pauses a moment to look at the old man, who, with a rumbling sigh, has taken out a silk handkerchief to put over his head. A bell sounds.*

MELLER. That was the front door, Sir. Do you wish to see anybody?

HEYTHORP. Man called Ventnor—no one else.

MELLER. No, Sir.

[*He goes out.*

OLD HEYTHORP, *on whom the light from the reading lamp falls brightly, sits back, listening, his eyes very much alive.*

MELLER. [*Re-entering, Left forward*] Mr. Ventnor, Sir.

VENTNOR *comes in, the door is closed, and he stands as if trying to adjust himself, in the dark room, to the pool of light and the richly-coloured old figure in it.*

HEYTHORP. Sorry, can't get up—sit down.

VENTNOR *draws a chair forward and sits within the radius of the light on the opposite side of the little table where the lamp stands.*

VENTNOR. I got your answer, Mr. Heythorp. [OLD HEYTHORP *nods*] I think it best to give you a chance to explain your conduct before going further.

HEYTHORP. Your letter's Greek to me.

VENTNOR. I can soon make it into plain English.

HEYTHORP. Sooner the better.

VENTNOR. Well, Mr. Heythorp, the long and the short of the matter is this: Our friend Mr. Pillin paid you a commission of ten per cent. on the sale of his ships.

[OLD HEYTHORP *makes a movement.*

Oh! excuse me! The money was settled on Mrs. Larne and her children—your grandchildren, you know.

HEYTHORP. Where did you get hold of that cock-and-bull story?

VENTNOR. It won't do, Mr. Heythorp! My witnesses are Mrs. Larne, Mr. Pillin himself, and Mr. Scriven. After I left you yesterday, you paid a visit to Mrs. Larne and told her of this settlement; told her to keep it dark, too. I happen to be her lawyer, and she telephoned to me.

[OLD HEYTHORP *makes a movement.* Yes—that gets you. The good lady is hard pressed, and she wanted to raise money on it. For that purpose she gave me a note to Scriven. Oh! you did it very neatly; but you're dealing with a man of the world, Mr. Heythorp.

HEYTHORP. [*Inaudibly*] With a blackguard.

VENTNOR. Beg pardon? I didn't get you. [*His voice hardens*] I had to drag it out of Scriven, but I find, as I surmised, that Mr. Pillin is the settler. Here's the joke, Mr. Heythorp; Mrs. Larne doesn't know Mr. Pillin, and Mr. Pillin doesn't know Mrs. Larne. I have it from their own mouths. Amusing, isn't it? £6,000 is the sum in settlement—10 per cent. on £60,000—a child could put that two and two together.

HEYTHORP. Nothing to me what Joe Pillin does with his money.

VENTNOR. Can you point to any other reason why Mr. Pillin should make this very clandestine sort of settlement on a woman he doesn't know?

HEYTHORP. [*After a pause*] Could—but won't.

VENTNOR. Easily said. You see, Mr. Heythorp, *you* told Mrs. Larne of this settlement.

HEYTHORP. Think you can tell that rigmarole to a meeting?

VENTNOR. I not only can, but, if necessary, I will.

HEYTHORP. You'll get the lie direct—no proof.

VENTNOR. Pardon me, I have the note from Mrs. Larne to her lawyer.

HEYTHORP. Nothing to connect her with me.

VENTNOR. Oh! I've not had dealings with Mrs. Larne without careful enquiry. It's well known in Dublin that her late husband was your natural son. I've got written testimony to that.

HEYTHORP. Bring an action against you—make you pay through the nose.

VENTNOR. Bluff—it won't do, Mr. Heythorp, and you know it. I've got you; the merest whiff of dicky-dealing like this will blow you out of your directorships. You've outstayed your welcome as it is. I told you as much yesterday.

HEYTHORP. Yes, you were good enough to sneer at my infirmities.

VENTNOR. [*Angrily*] I spoke the truth. And this business will finish you off.

HEYTHORP. If you're going to call this meeting, what have you come here for—blackmail?

VENTNOR. [*With growing choler*] Oh! you take that tone, do you? Still think you can ride roughshod? Well, you're very much mistaken. I advise

you to keep a civil tongue and consider your position.

HEYTHORP. What d'you want?

VENTNOR. I'm not sure this isn't a case for a prosecution.

HEYTHORP. Gammon!

VENTNOR. Neither gammon nor spinach. Now look here! You owe me three hundred pounds: you've owed it me for thirteen years. Either you pay me what you owe me at once, or I call this meeting and make what I know public. You'll very soon find out where you are, and a good thing too, for a more unscrupulous—unscrupulous——

HEYTHORP. [*Very red and swollen, and as if trying to rise*] So—you—you bully me!

VENTNOR. [*Rising*] You'll do no good for yourself by getting into a passion. At your age, and in your condition, I recommend a little prudence. Now just take my terms quietly, or you know what'll happen. I'm not to be intimidated by any of your brass. You've said you won't pay me, and I've said you shall. I'm out to show you who's master.

HEYTHORP. You cowardly, pettifogging attorney, do your damnedest!

VENTNOR. [*Seeing red*] Oho! Bluster it out, do you? You miserable old turkey-cock! You apoplectic old image! I'll have you off your Boards—I'll have you in the gutter. You think in your dotage you can still domineer? Two can play at that game. By George! one foot in bankruptcy, and one foot in the grave—Ha!

OLD HEYTHORP *has reached forward for the bell.* VENTNOR *removes it from his reach, and the old man sinks back. Somewhat relaxed by this assertion of his dominance,* VENTNOR *stands looking at the old man, who is lying back breathing hard.*

VENTNOR. Ah! that's shown you. Well, it's never too late to learn. For once you've come up against someone a leetle bit too much for you. Haven't you now? Better cry "Peccavi" and have done with it. [*Putting down the bell on the far edge of the table, he looks again at the old man, then takes a turn up and down, and again stops and looks at him*] You shouldn't have called me names. You're an old man, and I don't want to be too hard on you. I'm only showing you that you can't play God Almighty any longer. You've had your own way for too many years. And now you can't have it, see—that's all.

OLD HEYTHORP *moves forward in his chair again.*

Now, don't get into a passion again, calm yourself.

[*The old man is very still.*

That's better. I see you'll come round. For, mind you, this is your last chance. I'm a man of my word; and what I say, I do. Now then, are you going to pay me, and look pleasant?

OLD HEYTHORP, *by a violent and unsuspected effort, jerks himself forward and reaches the bell. As it rings* VENTNOR *makes a grab at it too late.*

VENTNOR. [*Angrily*] You're going to ruin, then?

[MELLER *has appeared.*

HEYTHORP. Show this hound out!

VENTNOR. [*Clenching his fists; then as* MELLER *moves towards him*] That's it, is it? Very well, Mr. Heythorp! Ah! *Very* well!

Carefully shepherded by MELLER, *he goes out.*

OLD HEYTHORP *sits slightly rocking his body from side to side; he puts his hand to his throat as if it had been worried.* MELLER *comes back.*

MELLER. [*Close*] Hope he hasn't hurt you, Sir?

HEYTHORP. No! Open the window—get the smell of the fellow out. Lost my temper—mistake. Pull me up!

MELLER, *who has drawn back the curtains and opened the window, disclosing the shapes of dark trees and the grape-bloom sky of a mild, moist night, now pulls him up.*

That's better. [*He takes a long breath*] Get me a hot bath before dinner, and put some pine stuff into it. Evening clothes.

MELLER. Really, Sir?

HEYTHORP. Why not?

MELLER. No, indeed, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Get up a bottle of the Perrier Jouet. What's the menu?

MELLER. Germane soup, Sir; filly de sole; sweetbread; cutlet soubees; rum souffly.

HEYTHORP. H'm! Tell her to get me an oyster, and put on a savoury.

MELLER. Yes, Sir. Excuse me, Sir, but did that—er—fellow—threaten you?

HEYTHORP. Bullied me.

MELLER. Could I do anything about it? I'm pretty handy with the gloves.

[*He puts up his fists.*

HEYTHORP. No. Trifle. Give me an appetite.

MELLER. Yes, Sir. Then what time shall I turn the bath in?

OLD HEYTHORP *returns to his chair and lowers himself into it.*

HEYTHORP. Seven o'clock. Have my nap now.

MELLER. Yes, Sir. [*He closes the window and draws the curtains*] Shall I turn out the light, Sir?

OLD HEYTHORP *nods.* MELLER *turns the lamp out, leaving only firelight, then goes out.*

HEYTHORP. [*Murmuring*] Cooked my own goose! H'm!

[*He settles himself for a sleep.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS FOR A MINUTE.

SCENE II

The scene is the same, about three hours later. OLD HEYTHORP, *in evening dress, is finishing dinner, his napkin tucked in low down on his dress shirt. He is just lifting a large empty champagne glass to a napkined champagne bottle in* MELLER'S *hand.*

HEYTHORP. Fill up.

MELLER. [*Remonstrative*] These are the special glasses, Sir, only four to the bottle.

HEYTHORP. Fill up! Buzz the bottle, before the sweet.

MELLER *fills the glass, emptying the bottle.* OLD HEYTHORP *drinks.*

Good wine.

MELLER. I frapped it just a little, Sir.

HEYTHORP. [*Attacking the soufflé before him*] Old fur coat in the wardrobe, no use for it—take it for yourself.

MELLER. Thank you, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Only get moth.

MELLER. It's got it, Sir.

HEYTHORP. M'm! Afraid I've worried you a lot.

MELLER. Oh! no, Sir—not more than reason.

HEYTHORP. Very sorry—can't help it—find that when you get like me.

MELLER. I've always admired your pluck, Sir; keeping the flag flyin'.

HEYTHORP. [*Bowing*] Much obliged to you.

OLD HEYTHORP *finishes the soufflé and sips brown sherry.*

MELLER. [*Touching the bell*] Cook's done a cheese remmyquin, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Give her my compliments—capital dinner.

The maid MOLLY *comes in with the "remmyquin," and gives it to* MELLER.

HEYTHORP. Have my port with it.

MELLER. [*Serving the ramequin*] Excuse me, Sir, but after a bottle of champagne—are you sure you ought?

HEYTHORP. [*Digging into the ramequin*] No, but I'm going to.

MELLER. It's very hot, Sir. Shall I take it out of the case?

HEYTHORP. Touch of cayenne.

MELLER. Yes, Sir. About the port—would you mind if I asked Miss Heythorp?

HEYTHORP. [*With fork arrested*] If you do you can leave my service.

MELLER. Well, Sir, I don't accept the responsibility.

HEYTHORP. Who asked you to? Not a baby.

MELLER. No, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Well, get it then!

MELLER, *after a look, shrugs his shoulders and goes to the improvised sideboard for the*

port. He pours it out gingerly, while OLD HEYTHORP *finishes the savoury.*

HEYTHORP. Fill! [*He drinks the glass savorously*] Help me up. [*He is helped up and into his chair*] Put the decanter there.

MOLLY *enters with a tray, on which are coffee and cigars.*

MELLER. [*Taking it from her—softly*] Gov'nor's goin' for the gloves to-night. Sherry—champagne—port. Simply can't hold him in.

MOLLY. [*As softly*] Poor old gentleman, let um have his pleasure. Shure he's only got his dinner.

[*He prepares the coffee, and she goes out.*

MELLER. Shall I cut your cigar, Sir?

HEYTHORP. Um! What's that squealing?

MELLER. [*Listening*] I think it's Miss Heythorp singing, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Cat. [*Finishing his third glass of port*] Ever hear Jenny Lind—eh—Swedish nightingale?

MELLER. Beg your pardon, Sir.

HEYTHORP. No, weren't born. Mario—Grisi—old Lablache—great days of opera, those.

MELLER. I'm sure, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Theatre too—old Kemble, Power, Little Robson—once saw Edmund Kean.

MELLER. Indeed, Sir! Would that be a relation of the present Edmund Keen?

HEYTHORP. Who's he?

MELLER. On the Halls, Sir, the great ventrilóquist.

HEYTHORP. No actors now. Saw Hermit win his Derby.

MELLER. [*Interested*] Did you, indeed, Sir? Was he the equal of Pretty Polly, do you think?

HEYTHORP. Don't know the lady.

MELLER. [*With a touch of pity*] No, Sir, you don't keep up with it, I suppose.

HEYTHORP. All four-in-hands then, tandems, gigs —drove my own cab—tiger behind.

MELLER. Those were little boys, weren't they, Sir?

HEYTHORP. Little rascals in boots—blue liveries—tight as a drum. Cremorne—Star and Garter. Wet sheet and a flowing tide. Great days.

MELLER. Your cigar, Sir?

HEYTHORP. [*Drinking off his coffee and taking his cigar, which* MELLER *lights*] All gone! [*Following the first puff of smoke, with a feeble wave of his cigar*] Smoke! Statesmen then—roast beef. Stout oak! Old Pam!

MELLER. Beg pardon, Sir?

HEYTHORP. Get me the old brandy.

MELLER. [*Aghast*] Brandy, Sir! I really daren't.

HEYTHORP. Bunkum!

MELLER. You'll forgive me, Sir; but if Miss Heythorp heard——

HEYTHORP. Are you my servant, or hers?

MELLER. Yours, Sir. But the doctor's orders were positive.

HEYTHORP. Damn the doctor! Get the brandy—mother's milk.

MELLER *wavers to the sideboard, and brings the bottle.*

HEYTHORP. Large glass—want to swing it round, get the aroma.

MELLER fetches a goblet and puts it and the bottle on the little table by the hand-bell, removing the port decanter, glass, and coffee cup.

HEYTHORP. Pour it out.

[MELLER *pours out a little brandy.*

MELLER. You said I might go out, Sir, but perhaps I'd better stay.

HEYTHORP. Why? [*With a grin*] Where I dines I sleeps. Ever hear of Jorrocks?

MELLER. No, Sir.

HEYTHORP. Good Lord!

MELLER. Yes, Sir. Of course, Molly will be handy, Sir, if you want anything.

He goes to the door, stands a moment, looking at the old man blowing rings from his cigar: throws up his hands suddenly, and goes out.

OLD HEYTHORP *very slowly and with a feeble hand takes up the glass and sits revolving it before his nose.*

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Send in my resignations to-morrow—not give that cur a chance.

He is drinking the brandy as the door is opened and ADELA HEYTHORP *comes in. She is in a white cloak, with one hand and arm in a long white glove and the other glove dangling from it. She has reached him before he sees her.*

ADELA. Father! Meller let out you're drinking brandy after champagne and port. That's absolute poison. It'll kill you.

OLD HEYTHORP thrusts out his tufted lower lip and reaches for the bottle.

Oh! no. If you behave like a baby, you must be treated like one.

She seizes the bottle and puts it back on the sideboard.

HEYTHORP. [*With his hand to his throat, as if he felt again the sensation of the afternoon*] So—*you* bully me—too—to-night!

ADELA. Well, really, Father! One would think you had no self-control at all. I don't know whether I ought to go out.

OLD HEYTHORP'S passion seems to yield before a thought. His face slowly assumes a sort of grin, in which there is a dash of cunning.

HEYTHORP. Perfectly well. Why not?

ADELA. If it weren't for Temperance I wouldn't. And I tell you, plainly: If you go on like this, I won't have liquor in the house. Good-night!

[*She turns and goes rustling away.*

The old man sits listening. There is the sound of a door shut and of a carriage moving from the door.

HEYTHORP. [*To himself*] Gone! Not so fast, my lady! Not under your heel till to-morrow. [*He makes an effort to get up, but cannot, and sits a moment breathing hard; then, stretching out his hand, he rings the bell*] Last night to call my soul my own.

After a moment the girl MOLLY *comes in, and stands regarding him.*

MOLLY. What would you be wantin', Sirr?

HEYTHORP. Good girl. Help me up.

MOLLY *takes his hands and pulls, but cannot raise him. He looks rather helplessly from side to side.*

MOLLY. Oh! Ut's me that's not strong enough. Would I get Cook?

OLD HEYTHORP *shakes his head. He puts his hands on the arms of the chair, and shifts his body towards the edge of the chair, then holds out his hands.*

HEYTHORP. Now!

The girl pulls and this time slowly raises him. He stands very still and flushed.

MOLLY. Sure, it's you have the big heart; it's never bate you are.

HEYTHORP. Thank you. That'll do. Want you again—ring.

MOLLY. Yes, Sirr. I'll be up all the time. It's the great unhookin' there'll be when the misthress comes home from her ball.

[*She goes.*

He does not move till she has gone. Then a smile comes on his face, and he goes across to the sideboard. Throughout the scene he retains his dignity.

HEYTHORP. [*Muttering*] Bully me—will she! [*He reaches up and takes the brandy bottle and a sherry glass. With infinite difficulty he pours into it, and*

slowly, slowly drinks it down; then, grasping the bottle to his chest, he moves across back to his chair, and sinks into it, with the bottle still clasped. For a few seconds he remains like that: then seems to realise that the attitude does not become a gentleman. Now begins his last struggle. The bottle is clasped in his arms; but his hands, with which he must place it on the table, have lost all feeling. Again he struggles, and succeeds in shifting his body in the chair towards the table which nearly overlaps the arm. He rests, breathing stertorously. Inch by inch he edges the base of the bottle till it touches the table; then rests again. With a groan and a supreme effort he screws his trunk over towards the table, and the bottle stands] Done it! [*His lips relax in a smile*] What's this? Red? [*His body sags back in the chair, he sits motionless, and slowly his eyes close*] To-morrow! [*There is a sound of suffering, and the word "To-morrow," repeated in a whispering sigh, dies into silence.*]

THE STAGE IS DARKENED FOR TWENTY SECONDS, TO REPRESENT THE LAPSE OF TWO HOURS.

SCENE III

The same. The door from the hall is opened and MELLER *enters. He moves two or three steps, looking at* OLD HEYTHORP *still recumbent in his chair.* PHYLLIS *has come into the doorway.*

MELLER. [*Turning back towards her, in a low voice*] Half-past eleven, Miss. Afraid it's too late for you to see him. He's asleep.

PHYLLIS. [*Low*] I won't wake him, unless he happens to. But I did want to show him my dress! [*She has on a cloak over a dress of white tulle, her first low-cut frock; a bunch of lilies of the valley is at her breast.*]

MELLER. As a fact, Miss, it wouldn't matter if you did wake him. He's got to go to bed.

BOB PILLIN *has moved into the doorway and stands close to* PHYLLIS; MELLER *passes them and goes out.*

PHYLLIS. [*Under her breath*] Bob, hold my cloak!

BOB PILLIN *reverently removes the cloak, which catches.*

Oh! you duffy! Is it clear?

BOB PILLIN. [*Under his breath*] Not quite. It's a pin. I'm so afraid of hurting you.

PHYLLIS. Oh! Gefoozlem! Let it rip! Ouch!

BOB PILLIN. [*Cloak in hand*] My God! Did I——?

PHYLLIS. [*Mending him with a smile*] All serene! [*She steals into the lamp glow*] Guardy! My dress, Guardy!

No answer. She stands twiddling the bunch of lilies; BOB PILLIN *closes up.*

PHYLLIS. [*Whispering*] He *is* fast and deep, isn't he? [*Holding up the flower*] I'll put it in his buttonhole. When he wakes, won't he jump? [*She steals close, bends, and slips the flowers into the buttonhole. Then kisses the tip of her finger, and blows the kiss at him*] Good-night, Guardy, dear; bless you! [*She skips back, twirls round, reluctant to go without being seen, and blows another kiss*] I do wish he'd wake! He'll be sorry he didn't see my dress.

At the disappointed whisper BOB PILLIN *walks up to the old man, and bends. Suddenly he stands up and looks back at* PHYLLIS.

PHYLLIS. Is he awake?

BOB PILLIN. [*In a queer voice*] No.

PHYLLIS. I *must* just try again.

BOB PILLIN. No. [*He moves as she comes near, and very decisively places his hands on her shoulders*] No. Not fair. Come along. [*She looks up at him, intrigued by the firmness of his voice and touch.*]

PHYLLIS. [*Wilfully*] I *will* wake him!

As she speaks, he just turns her round, and pushes her before him quietly and slowly off into the hall.

PHYLLIS. [*Under her breath, mockingly, to the air before her*] Oo-oh! Aren't we strong!

There is a little laugh from her, outside. Then the sound of a closing door, and of a carriage driving away.

MELLER *comes hastening into the room and goes quickly up to the chair.*

MELLER. Sir! [*Louder*] Sir! [*He touches the shoulder, then shakes it slightly*] Bed-time, Sir!

He bends down, listens; stands up abruptly and beckons to MOLLY *in the doorway. The girl comes quickly.*

MELLER. [*Sharply*] That gentleman's right. He's not breathing. Feel his forehead!

The girl, feeling it, draws her hand away sharply.

MOLLY. Oh! Ut's cold as ice. Oh! no! Shure, an' he's niver——!

MELLER. [*With his hand on the old man's pulse, in an awed voice*] Gone!

MOLLY. Mother o' Jasus! The grand old fightin' gintleman! The great old sinner he was!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

END.

THE SHOW

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

(*In Order of Appearance*)

Anne Morecombe
A Maid
A Detective
A Divisional Surgeon
A Constable
A Cook
Daisy Odiham
A Reporter
Colonel Roland
Geoffrey Darrel
An Editor
A Secretary
A News Editor
Lady Morecombe
Odiham
A Coroner's Clerk
A Constable
Lieutenant Oswald, R.N.
Some Persons
The Foreman and Seven Other Jurymen

THE SHOW

PRODUCED AT THE ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE
JULY 1ST, 1925

CAST

ANNE MORECOMBE . .	By Miss Molly Kerr.
A MAID	" Miss Eileen Sharp.
A DETECTIVE . . .	" Mr. Leslie Banks.
A DIVISIONAL SURGEON	" Mr. Marcus Barron.
A CONSTABLE (ACT I) .	" Mr. Bryan Powley.
A COOK	" Miss Una O'Connor.
DAISY ODIHAM . . .	" Miss Hermione Baddeley.
A REPORTER	" Mr. Clifford Mollison.
COLONEL ROLAND . .	" Mr. Felix Aylmer.
GEOFFREY DARREL . .	" Mr. Ian Hunter.
AN EDITOR	" Mr. Aubrey Mather.
A SECRETARY . . .	" Miss Ethne Honan.
A NEWS EDITOR . .	" Mr. Eliot Makeham.
LADY MORECOMBE . .	" Miss Haidee Wright.
MR. ODIHAM	" Mr. Ben Field.
A CORONER'S CLERK .	" Mr. Lawrence Baskcomb.
A LADY	" Miss Mary Forbes.
AN OFFICER OF THE AIR MINISTRY	" Mr. Eliot Makeham.
THREE LADIES . . .	" Mesdames Una O'Connor, Vane, and Valerie Taylor.
A CONSTABLE (ACT III)	" Mr. Aubrey Mather.
LIEUT. OSWALD, R.N. .	" Mr. Robert Harris.
FOREMAN OF THE JURY	" Mr. Bryan Powley.
THE CORONER'S JURY .	" Messrs. Robert Drysdale, A.G. Poulton, Marcus Barron, Carleton Hobbs, Ivor Barnard, Ian O. Will, and Malcolm Rignold.
PRESS ASSOCIATION REPORTER	" Mr. Vere Bennett.

Produced by BASIL DEAN

SCENES

ACT I.

Study in the MORECOMBES' *House, Kensington. A March morning.*

ACT II.

SCENE I. An EDITOR'S *Room, the following morning.*

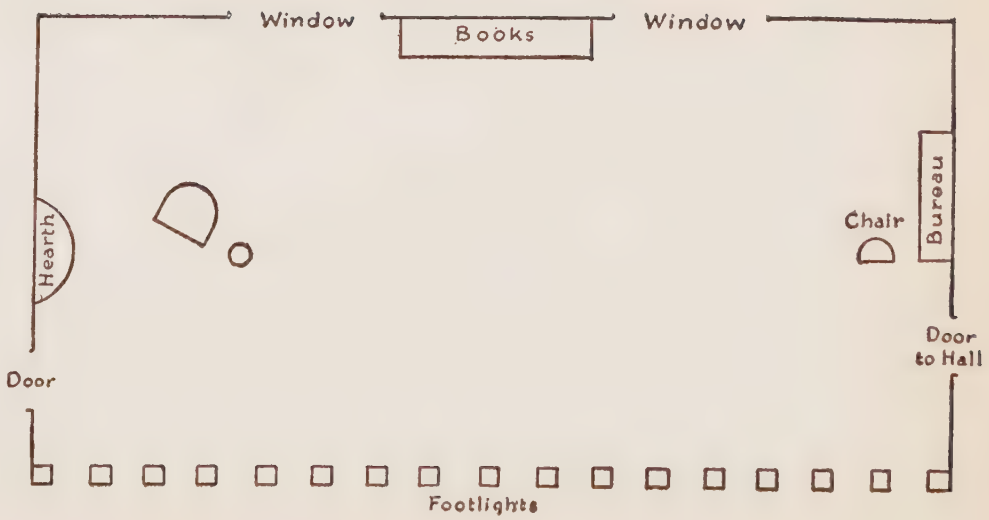
SCENE II. The MORECOMBES' *Study, a little later.*

ACT III.

Waiting-room at a CORONER'S *Court, again the following morning.*

TIME—*The Present.*

ACT I


Window
Books
Window
Hearth
Chair
Bureau
Door
Door
to Hall
Footlights

ACT I

It is ten o'clock on a March morning. The study of a house in Kensington is empty and curtained, but narrow streaks of daylight come in between the window-curtains of the two windows, Back. A low-backed armchair is drawn up to the fireplace, Right. There is a door below the fireplace, and another opposite to it, Left. A bureau stands over on the left. On it is a telephone. On a stool by the armchair is a tray with a decanter of brandy, a syphon, and a glass. The room is tastefully enough apparelled, and there is a bookcase between the windows. A small model of a flying-machine stands on the top of it.

The door on the right is opened, and ANNE MORECOMBE *comes in; about twenty-five years old, dark, very pale, with an excellent figure and a reticent beauty. She turns up the light, stands gazing at the armchair, shudders, passes swiftly across the room, locks the door, Left, and takes up the receiver of the telephone.*

ANNE. Chelsea 0012. . . . Is that—is that you, Geof?—Anne speaking. [*Her voice is low, quick and tense*] An awful's thing's happened. Colin has shot

himself. . . . Yes . . . through the heart . . . last night. . . . When I got in from you, I found him here in the study in—his—armchair—dead. The doctor said about two hours. . . . Yes, the police came. . . . No, no doubt—no. The pistol was still in his hand—his own. . . . Us. . . . No, no! He didn't know—I'm sure not. And if he had, he wouldn't have cared. You know he wouldn't. . . . No! I can't conceive—I don't know anything of his affairs—no more than he knew of mine——

She hears a sound, swiftly replaces the receiver, swiftly unlocks the door, and re-crosses to the door, Right, just as the door Left is opened and a MAID *enters, saying:*

MAID. This is the room, Sir.

TWO MEN *enter. One is a Detective in plain clothes with a valise, the other a Divisional Surgeon of Police.*

DETECTIVE. Mrs. Morecombe?

ANNE. Yes.

DETECTIVE. I'm Detective-Inspector Flayne from Scotland Yard. The Superintendent sent me round. The Divisional Surgeon, Ma'am. He was away last night. I'd like him to see the body before it's removed.

ANNE. This way.

DETECTIVE. One moment. This is the chair? Nothing's been touched since the police were here last night?

ANNE. No. Not since they took him upstairs.

DETECTIVE. [*Referring to a note, sitting down in the*

chair, head forward, right hand on lap] Is that right, Ma'am?

ANNE. [*In a whisper*] Yes.

DETECTIVE. [*Touching his own chest*] The clothes were undone here, I believe?

ANNE. Yes.

DETECTIVE. [*Nodding to the surgeon, and rising*] The Superintendent tells me they went carefully through everything in this room last night. I have the Major's papers here. [*Lifts the valise*] Is there anything upstairs, Ma'am, I ought to have?

ANNE. I don't think so. He kept everything here.

DETECTIVE. We'll just go up, if you'll kindly take us. Excuse me, you were down here to——?

ANNE. I was telephoning.

DETECTIVE. I see. If you'll take the doctor up, I'll come in a minute.

ANNE *goes out, followed by the* SURGEON, *who has eyed her keenly.*

The DETECTIVE *draws the curtains of one window fully back, and looks out, then round the room. The telephone bell rings. He takes up the receiver and listens.*

DETECTIVE. Who's speaking? [*There is instant cessation as if he had been cut off*] Um! Wrong number, or was mine the wrong voice? [*He replaces the receiver; stands a moment considering, then goes to the door, Left, and opens it*] Simpson?

[A CONSTABLE *in uniform appears.*

You were on duty last night, this beat?

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. You didn't hear this shot? [*Referring to his notes*] The doctor puts his death at about nine, I see.

CONSTABLE. No, Sir, I didn't.

DETECTIVE. See anybody come out of this house?

CONSTABLE. No, Sir. I saw the lady come in.

DETECTIVE. What time?

CONSTABLE. Half-past ten, Sir, I should say.

DETECTIVE. [*Referring to his notes*] Alone?

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How did you come to notice her?

CONSTABLE. I know her pretty well. She parted from a gentleman half-way up the street, round the corner.

DETECTIVE. Oh! Do you know him?

CONSTABLE. No, Sir, I don't know him; but it's not the first time, by many.

DETECTIVE. Then you'd know him if you saw him? [*Receiving a nod*] What's he like?

CONSTABLE. Tallish young man with a soft 'at.

DETECTIVE, *after a moment's reflection, goes to the telephone and looks at the number on it.*

DETECTIVE. [*Taking up receiver*] Exchange. This house has just been rung up and the call was cut off somehow. . . . Oh! They're still waiting—just put me back. . . . Hallo! What number is that? . . . Chelsea 0012. Thank you! [*He replaces the receiver and jots the number down. To the* CONSTABLE] Take my card, and this number, find out to what name and address it belongs, and bring it back to me at once. Send that maid in here.

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

[*He goes out.*

The DETECTIVE *crosses the room, takes up the glass by its base and examines the rim for finger-marks. The* MAID *comes in.*

MAID. Yes, Sir?

DETECTIVE. Ah! you. Name?

MAID. Ellen Frost.

DETECTIVE. No one's touched this, of course?

MAID. Oh, no!

DETECTIVE. When did Major Morecombe come in last night?

MAID. About eight, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How d'you know?

MAID. I saw him coming from the gate. He called down that he'd had dinner.

DETECTIVE. Oh! What sort of voice?

MAID. Just his usual, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Did you bring him this brandy?

MAID. Yes. He rang for it about half-past eight. He was finishing a letter—he gave it to me to post at once.

DETECTIVE. A letter? Who to?

MAID. I didn't notice, Sir. I just went out with it and dropped it in the box, and brought up the brandy. Then he was sitting in that chair.

DETECTIVE. How did he look?

MAID. Very quiet-like—had his head on his hand—like this. [*Places her hand to her forehead.*]

DETECTIVE. Said nothing?

MAID. No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How much brandy should you say he drank?

MAID. [*Scrutinising decanter*] A good deal, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Half a tumbler?

MAID. About that, I should think.

DETECTIVE. [*Taking a revolver from the valise*] Do you know this?

MAID. [*Wincing*] Yes, I think so. He used to keep it in the bureau drawer.

DETECTIVE. You didn't see it when you brought the brandy up?

MAID. No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Did you see him again alive?

MAID. [*Upset*] No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Did you hear the shot?

MAID. Well, Sir, I did seem to hear a sound when the gramophone was singing "Butter me 'eart, Charlie." I don't know if you know it, it's rather a loud song.

DETECTIVE. Where were you?

MAID. In the kitchen—[*Pointing Stage Left*]—that's in the basement, below the drawing-room. It was just before our supper.

DETECTIVE. What time?

MAID. About nine it would be.

DETECTIVE. But what you heard didn't bring you up?

MAID. Well, I didn't rightly think it was in the house at all like.

DETECTIVE. How long have you been here?

MAID. Ever since they were married and come to this house, Sir. Four years now.

DETECTIVE. [*Referring to his notes*] They didn't sleep in the same room, I see.

MAID. No, Sir.

DETECTIVE. How long's that been going on?

MAID. It must be—a year, or fifteen months, about, that the Major's been on the top floor.

DETECTIVE. They weren't on terms, then? [*The* MAID *hesitates*] Better be quite frank.

MAID. There was never any words, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Come! Were they living together? You know what I mean.

MAID. No, Sir, they weren't; at least as far as I know.

DETECTIVE. And hadn't been, for a long time?

MAID. No.

DETECTIVE. They went out separately a good deal?

MAID. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Mrs. Morecombe was out last night?

MAID. Yes; I let her in at half-past ten.

DETECTIVE. I see. The Major a violent man?

MAID. Oh! no, Sir. Very depressed at times.

DETECTIVE. How d'you mean?

MAID. I hardly know. He seemed to come to an end, like.

DETECTIVE. Hold his head in his hands—that sort of thing?

MAID. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Distinguished flying man in the war, I believe?

MAID. Oh! yes, Sir. He was a hero.

DETECTIVE. H'm! There were others. Did he get many letters?

MAID. I don't know what you'd call many—six or seven a day, perhaps.

DETECTIVE. Any money pressure that you know of, eh?

MAID. Oh! no, Sir; I'm sure there wasn't.

DETECTIVE. What makes you sure?

MAID. Well, I've never heard money mentioned, 'ardly.

DETECTIVE. Not much talk between them at all, eh?

MAID. No, that's true. Still, you know what money is. If there's money trouble, you're bound to hear of it.

DETECTIVE. That's right. Which did you like best —the Major or Mrs. Morecombe?

MAID. Oh! well, Sir, I like them both very much. The poor Major.

DETECTIVE. Ah! Sad thing—very! So you like Mrs. Morecombe, too?

MAID. I *do*.

DETECTIVE. What's her family?

MAID. I think there's only her father, old Colonel Roland.

DETECTIVE. Still in the Service?

MAID. Oh! no; he's too old—near seventy, I should think.

DETECTIVE. No brothers?

MAID. No, Sir. She was an only child, I believe.

DETECTIVE. [*Suddenly*] Some reason for the Major and her being estranged. What was it?

MAID. I couldn't tell you, really.

DETECTIVE. How d'you mean—couldn't?

MAID. Well, I don't know.

DETECTIVE. Come! A love affair, eh?

MAID. [*Flustered.*] Really, I can't tell you—I've never seen anything.

DETECTIVE. Yes, but straws show the way the wind blows.

MAID. [*Suddenly resolute*] I never saw any straws.

DETECTIVE. [*With a sharp look*] I see. Knows, but won't tell.

MAID. [*Flustered again*] No, Sir, really; and it wasn't my business.

DETECTIVE. It's your business to tell what you know. We've got to find out why this happened; and you've got to help us. Come along with it! Here we have two young people who haven't lived together for fifteen months, you say. Well, that means that one or other of them, or both, was friendly with someone else. Now doesn't it?

MAID. [*Stubbornly*] Not knowing, I can't say.

DETECTIVE. Very well. Who came here calling? While I go upstairs, sit down and write the names down, and mind you don't leave any out.

MAID. No, Sir.

[He goes out by the door, Right. She sits down at the bureau: and, sucking a pencil, writes down name after name, as they

occur to her. The door Left is thrown open, and the COOK, *an older woman, appears.*

COOK. Here's a young woman—I can't keep her out.

DAISY ODIHAM *passes her and comes in: pretty, soft, distracted. The* MAID *has started up, the* COOK *hangs, as it were, in the doorway.*

DAISY. [*Quite abandoned to emotion—not a very educated voice*] It's not true—it's not true, is it? Say it's not true! Not dead—I mean; not *dead?*

MAID. [*Affected*] Yes, it's true enough.

DAISY. Oh, God! Oh, God! [*She sinks down in the chair, burying her forehead against the bureau and rocking her body. The* COOK *crosses to the brandy, pours out some and brings it to her.*]

COOK. Here, drink some of this. Who are you, my dear?

[*The* GIRL, *after repulsing it, drinks.*

DAISY. [*Throwing up her head*] What's it matter who I am? I'm nobody—Oh, God! [*Suddenly*] Didn't he leave a word for me? Not a word? Nothing?

MAID. I don't know; I'll ask them if you'll tell me your name.

DAISY. Oh! no; what does it matter—if he's dead? Leave me alone. I'm going.

COOK. You're not going to do anything rash?

DAISY. [*Still wild*] Rash? I couldn't see him, could I?

MAID. Mrs. Morecombe's up there, with the police.

DAISY. Oh! I'm going—I'm going! [*Suddenly calmer—almost hard*] It's all right—thank you.

She puts aside the COOK's *hand and walks out, with the back of her hand over her face; the* MAIDS *staring after her.*

COOK. Poor thing! [*Coming in a little*] I say—d'you think she's the skeleton in the cupboard?

MAID. [*Still much upset*] And they worrying me with their questions! What am I to say to them now?

COOK. That girl ought to be followed. She might throw herself in the river.

Suddenly they see that a YOUNG MAN *is standing in the doorway; a nice-looking young newspaper reporter.*

REPORTER. It's all right. She *is* being followed. Don't be alarmed. She left the front door open, so I came in to tell you that my friend won't lose sight of her. [*Looking at their hostile faces*] I'm afraid I'm giving you trouble. [*He goes close to the* MAID *and tries to place a note in her hand*] So sorry!

MAID. [*Rejecting the note*] No; I don't know who you are or what business you've got here.

REPORTER. [*With an engaging smile*] Oh! of course, if you feel like that. But it's quite all right. I'm from *The Evening Sun.*

COOK. Oh! That's the one that's "Bright and Early"—ain't it? What does it want here?

REPORTER. Well, you can imagine—this is tremendously interesting to the public. Major Morecombe

was a real war hero; everybody remembers that flight of his into Germany. So this is the room? That the chair? [*He crosses*] No blood, I see. [*He is swiftly touring the room.*]

MAID. Excuse me, I think I'll tell the Inspector you're here, and you can ask him any questions you want. [*To* COOK, *sotto voce*] Watch it!

[*She goes out, Right.*

REPORTER. [*To* COOK] I say, before they come—*you* know all the ins and outs. Do tell me your theory?

COOK. [*Drily*] Not me. I don't want none of your questions—this is a private house.

REPORTER. [*Hurt*] It's not idle curiosity. Men like Major Morecombe can't shoot themselves without intriguing the Public.

COOK. Well, I don't hold with the papers. If I put my head under the gas, I can do very well without any fuss.

REPORTER. But you'd get it.

COOK. Well, I'm not goin' to oblige, yet, nor 'elp you make a show of the poor Major neither. Let him rest in peace.

REPORTER. Unfortunately, it's my job not to.

COOK. Then I'd get another if I was you.

REPORTER. Easily said, I'm afraid.

He stands dignified and still as the DETECTIVE *enters. The* COOK, *who is close to the door, Left, lingers.*

REPORTER. [*Handing a card to the* DETECTIVE] Can you give me any information?

DETECTIVE. None at present. There'll be an inquest.

REPORTER. Can I say anything?

DETECTIVE. [*With a faint smile*] You may say "the police have the matter in hand."

The CONSTABLE *enters, and goes up to the* DETECTIVE.

CONSTABLE. Name and address of that mumber, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Thank you.

[*The* REPORTER *has pricked his ears.*

REPORTER. Any development, Inspector?

DETECTIVE. No; and not likely to be, so long as you take up my time.

REPORTER. Sorry, Inspector. Then I'll say goodbye for the present.

DETECTIVE. I should.

COOK. Shall I show him out? [*The* DETECTIVE *nods.*]

REPORTER. [*With a smile*] Coldly received. Good morning.

[*He goes out, Left, followed by the* COOK.

DETECTIVE. Confound these fellers—like flies, the way they buzz round a carcase. [*Consulting the bit of paper given him*] You'll come with me and identify this gentleman, Simpson.

CONSTABLE. Very good, Sir.

[*He goes out at a nod from the* DETECTIVE.

The DETECTIVE *goes over to the bureau and takes up the list of names the* MAID *has written down. He compares it with the name*

given him by the CONSTABLE, *and rings the bell. The* MAID *enters.*

DETECTIVE. These all you can think of?

MAID. No, Sir. I was interrupted. There might be a few others.

DETECTIVE. [*With a sharp look, showing her the paper given him by the* CONSTABLE] Doesn't that gentleman come here?

MAID. [*Disconcerted*] He—he has been, Sir; but not for a long time now.

DETECTIVE. Friend of Mrs. Morecombe. Come—the truth!

MAID. I—I think so, Sir.

DETECTIVE. Friend of the Major's, too? [*The* MAID *hesitates*] You needn't answer, that's quite enough. There was a row over him—some time back?

MAID. No, Sir—at least, I never——

DETECTIVE. How do you account for his ceasing to come, then?

MAID. I'm sure I don't know; perhaps he's got other things to do.

DETECTIVE. How long since he came?

MAID. About a year, I think.

DETECTIVE. Exactly; and the Major went up-stairs fifteen months ago. Now, about that letter you posted. You *can't* remember who it was to?

MAID. No, Sir; I never read the address.

DETECTIVE. Sure? There's nothing to be ashamed of.

MAID. I'm not ashamed, because I didn't read it.

DETECTIVE. Well now—keep my questions to yourself—see?

MAID. [*With quivering lips*] Y-yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. [*As the* SURGEON *and* ANNE *come in*] You can go now.

[*The* MAID *goes, Left.*

SURGEON. I must be going on, Inspector. The barrel was carefully adjusted and resting against the bare skin; death instantaneous. Quite satisfied with Dr. Mackay's report; nothing to indicate he's got the time wrong. So far as one can judge as yet, and from what this lady says, he was quite a healthy subject. Good day, Madam.

DETECTIVE. The inquest will be the day after tomorrow, Sir. I'll be taking [*Lowering his voice*] the body round to the mortuary before lunch.

SURGEON. Quite. Good morning.

[*He goes out, Left.*

DETECTIVE. Sit down, Madam—you must be worn out. I just want to ask you a question or two. [ANNE *remains standing*] Now, can you tell me why this happened?

ANNE. [*With a quick little negative movement*] No, I can't. I can't.

DETECTIVE. Both the doctors seem agreed there was no disease. What do you say to that?

ANNE. Oh! None, I'm sure.

DETECTIVE. And no money troubles?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. Comfortably off, eh?

ANNE. Yes, both of us.

DETECTIVE. Now, Ma'am—we have to know everything—Why were you and the Major on distant terms?

ANNE. We weren't on bad terms at all.

DETECTIVE. Were you husband and wife?

ANNE. Not in one sense.

DETECTIVE. Excuse me, there must have been some reason for that.

ANNE. Only that we agreed not to be, some time ago.

DETECTIVE. Did that suggestion emanate from you or from your husband?

ANNE. From—from him first.

DETECTIVE. Oh! from him! And you didn't object?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. Now you see, the question is: Why did the Major take his life? The Coroner'll want to know how to direct the Jury. Was it insanity, or was there a good reason?

ANNE. What does it matter? Nothing will bring him back?

DETECTIVE. Well, that's a way of looking at it, but it's not customary. A violent death like this has to be gone into. When exactly did you agree to go your own ways?

ANNE. The Christmas before last.

DETECTIVE. Fifteen months. And you won't give me a reason?

ANNE. You must excuse me.

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] Very well, Ma'am. It would

be better for you to be frank, but please yourself. Am I to take it that you know of nothing that should make your husband take his life?

ANNE. No—unless——

DETECTIVE. [*Intrigued*] Yes?

ANNE. Unless it was in a fit of black depression. He was very moody.

DETECTIVE. [*Disappointed*] Oh! Come! Had he ever threatened to?

ANNE. Not to me.

DETECTIVE. It really is a pity, Ma'am, that you can't give me a better reason. It simply means we've got to look for one.

ANNE. I don't know anything about my husband's private affairs.

DETECTIVE. But you know your own, Ma'am.

ANNE. [*After a pause*] What do you mean?

DETECTIVE. Most of us have them.

ANNE. It sounded insulting.

DETECTIVE. [*A little harder*] You came in at ten-thirty, I believe, last night?

ANNE. Yes.

DETECTIVE. What time had you gone out?

ANNE. At six o'clock.

DETECTIVE. And between those hours?

ANNE. [*After a pause*] No, Inspector, I object to being asked questions that have no bearing on this. [*She points to the armchair.*]

DETECTIVE. Madam, reservations in a case of this sort have the worst construction placed on them; and rightly.

ANNE. I can't help that.

DETECTIVE. [*Looking at her with a sort of admiration*] Was your husband in last evening when you went out?

ANNE. No. He went out just before me.

DETECTIVE. Perhaps you can tell me at least if he knew where you were going?

ANNE. He didn't.

DETECTIVE. How can you tell that?

ANNE. I'm sure.

DETECTIVE. Would he have minded if he had known?

ANNE. I—I don't think so.

DETECTIVE. I'm suggesting, you know, that he did happen to know, and that this [*Pointing to the chair*] was the result.

ANNE. No—oh! no.

DETECTIVE. Well, Ma'am, you're making it all very mysterious. We shall have to know where you were last night.

ANNE. [*Twisting her hands*] I tell you that where I was has no bearing on this. If you persist, it won't help you.

DETECTIVE. I should consult your father, if I were you, Ma'am, and follow his advice. I'll be seeing you again before long. [*He looks at the bit of paper given him by the* CONSTABLE, *encloses it in his notebook, snaps that to, and goes towards the door, Left*] For the present, Madam.

[*He goes out.*

ANNE, *left alone, twists her hands, clasps them*

on her breast, and looks restlessly about her. She springs towards the telephone, but stops and shakes her head. Then she rings the bell. The MAID *enters.*

ANNE. Has that man gone, Ellen?

MAID. Yes, Ma'am. [*Looking at her*] They don't seem to have an idea of privacy. [*After a glance*] He wanted to know who comes here. I had to write down all I could think of—— [*A little pause, and* ANNE *makes a movement with her hands*] in the last six months.

ANNE. [*Relieved*] Oh! yes; of course.

MAID. [*About to go, and turning*] Please, while you was upstairs—there was a—a young man too—from the Press.

[*A bell rings.*

The front door, Ma'am. You won't wish to see people, I suppose.

ANNE. Only my father—I'm expecting him.

The MAID *goes out and returns immediately.*

MAID. It *is* Colonel Roland, Ma'am.

COLONEL ROLAND *follows her in and the* MAID *goes out. He is tall, grey, slightly bowed, Irish by birth, with a look as of a kindly Bengal tiger in his highly-coloured face. He goes straight up to his daughter and puts his hands on her shoulders.*

COL. ROLAND. My poor girl! This is a dreadful thing.

ANNE. [*Dully*] Yes, Dad.

COL. ROLAND. Why, in the name of the Saints——?

ANNE. I don't know.

COL. ROLAND. Surely, my child——

ANNE. I don't, Dad.

COL. ROLAND. To take his own life—with his record! [*He looks at her searchingly; puzzled.*]

ANNE. [*After a little pause*] I've never bothered you, Dad, with our affairs, but Colin and I had been strangers for a long time.

COL. ROLAND. Strangers? How's that, Anne?

ANNE. The whole thing was a mistake, I'm afraid.

COL. ROLAND. [*Disturbed*] Well, well, I won't ask you any questions now. It hasn't been your fault, I know.

ANNE. Nor his.

COL. ROLAND. I'm glad to hear that; I liked Colin —I liked um. He was a fine fellow—for a flyin' man. Have the police been?

ANNE. Yes; and the Press.

COL. ROLAND. Confound them—they'll make a show of it, if they can. What do the police say?

ANNE. Only that they have to know everything for the inquest. They've taken all his papers.

COL. ROLAND. What's in them, Anne?

ANNE. I tell you, Dad, I know no more of Colin than he knew of me.

COL. ROLAND. Of you? What should there be to know of you, my child?

ANNE. [*Lowering her head—suddenly*] Father, I don't know what's coming of this. But you must believe there was an absolute compact between us to go our

own ways. If it hadn't been for you, we might have thought of a divorce; but I knew you'd hate it so.

COL. ROLAND. Divorce! Indeed, I would! Well, the poor fellow's gone! In his prime! Well—well!

[*The* MAID *enters.*

MAID. Excuse me, Ma'am. This young man again —from the newspaper.

COL. ROLAND. Tell um to go to ——! No. I'll tell um myself. [*He follows the* MAID *to the door, where he meets the* REPORTER *coming in*] Now then, Sir, what is it you want?

REPORTER. [*To* ANNE] Mrs. Morecombe?

COL. ROLAND. Will you be good enough to understand that my daughter has just suffered a bereavement? This sort of intrusion is unwelcome.

REPORTER. Colonel Roland, I believe? I'm extremely sorry, Sir. It's very distasteful to me, too. But the Public——

COL. ROLAND. Damn the Public!

ANNE. What is it you want to know?

REPORTER. If you *could* tell me anything—about the Major's health, for instance; or whether his new aeroplane design had been refused. He was such a distinguished man. Any news——

ANNE. My husband's health was good; and I don't think he had even offered any design lately.

REPORTER. [*Nervously*] Well, thank you very much. Of course, that adds to the mystery, doesn't it?

COL. ROLAND. I'd be glad if you'd tell your pa-

per, Sir, to keep its nose out of people's private affairs.

REPORTER. [*Pleasantly*] When you say private, you forget the inquest, don't you?

COL. ROLAND. I presume the inquest will be a decent quiet affair.

REPORTER. Oh! do you, Sir? I wonder!

ANNE. Are you married?

REPORTER. Yes.

ANNE. If she committed suicide, would you like persons coming to ask you about her?

REPORTER. Oh! But surely—a paper isn't an ordinary——

COL. ROLAND. No! It's a devilish sight worse.

REPORTER. [*Ruefully*] Well, Sir, really, we *have* to take notice when things like this happen. What do you suppose we're for?

COL. ROLAND. Good day to you.

The REPORTER *hesitates a moment, then, with a murmured* "Good morning—so sorry!" *goes out.*

ANNE. [*With a sudden breakdown of her composure, burying her face against her father's chest*] Oh! Dad—it's horrible!

COL. ROLAND. There, there, my child! Don't think about it! Go and lie down. You must be half dead. I'll come back after lunch.

ANNE. Yes, I *will* lie down. Good-bye, Dad!

COL. ROLAND. [*Kissing her forehead*] Good-bye, my dear; bless you! Get a good sleep.

[*He goes out.*

ANNE. [*Stands a moment, considering, then goes to the telephone*] Give me Chelsea 0012. . . . [*A pause*] Haven't you got that number? [*Pause*] Ring them again, please. . . . [*Pause*] No answer?

MAID. [*Entering*] You said you wouldn't see anyone, Ma'am. But——

ANNE. Who is it?

MAID. Mr. Darrel, Ma'am.

ANNE. Oh! [*Replacing the receiver, she stares hard at the* MAID, *who exhibits signs of confusion*] I'll see him.

She clasps her hands. The MAID *goes out, and returns ushering in* GEOFFREY DARREL, *a tall young man, very constrained, who the moment she has gone, darts forward to* ANNE *and kisses her.*

DARREL. My darling!

ANNE. Geof! How could you come here? You mustn't. I'd just rung you up again. We simply can't see each other till this is all over.

DARREL. It's awful for you—this! I had to come. I couldn't stick it.

ANNE. Did you meet my father going away?

DARREL. No—nobody.

ANNE. You mustn't stay. The Police—the Press. They want to find his motive. They'll drag up everything they can for the inquest.

DARREL. They don't know about us?

ANNE. They suspect *something*. I'm terrified, for Father's sake.

DARREL. My child, it's Nemesis. We ought to have gone off long ago.

ANNE. Oh! Geof, I know; I was wrong—I was wrong. Why didn't I face telling Father? But he's so old-fashioned, and a Catholic never——

DARREL. Thank Heaven you're free now!

ANNE. Last night— [*Shuddering and pointing to the chair*] I'd seen him at tea-time—he seemed just as usual. And yet, he must have known then what he was going to do. He looked——' Things came back.

DARREL. [*Jealously*] Anne!

ANNE. No, no! Only it seemed so brutal. I was all warm coming from you. And he was so white and cold. The last thing I said to you—and he was dead when I said it. [*Her lips quiver.*]

DARREL. Don't, darling, don't!

ANNE. But *why—why?* It's an utter mystery. If I thought it was because of us—but I'm sure—I'm sure it wasn't. I'm sure he never knew. Besides, I feel certain he had someone. Geof, you mustn't stay! Quick! Think! What's best?

DARREL. Abroad. Couldn't we go now? *Must* you be at the inquest?

ANNE. Of course! I found him. Geof, suppose it comes out about us?

DARREL. [*Suddenly—low*] Listen! The bell!

ANNE. [*Breathless*] Oh! [*She moves to the door.*]

The MAID *comes in and stands staring at* DARREL.

MAID. [*Low*] It's the Detective again, Ma'am.

ANNE. I can't see anyone just now.

MAID. Shall I say you're asleep, Ma'am? I don't think anything else'd stop him.

ANNE. Ask him to come again at twelve.

But as the MAID *opens the door to go, the* DETECTIVE *enters, and shuts the door on her.*

DETECTIVE. Excuse me, Madam. Mr. Geoffrey Darrel, I believe?

DARREL. [*Startled*] Yes.

DETECTIVE. [*Showing* DARREL *his card*] I've been round to your rooms, Sir. About this death of Major Morecombe—if you'll kindly answer a question or two.

DARREL. I?

DETECTIVE. Where did you spend last evening?

DARREL. At home. Why?

DETECTIVE. Didn't go out?

DARREL. I went out soon after ten for a bit.

DETECTIVE. Exactly! You parted from Mrs. Morecombe close here about ten-twenty?

DARREL. What? How do you mean?

DETECTIVE. Now, Sir, don't prevaricate, please. The Constable on this beat saw you taking leave of her at that time. Was she with you at your rooms?

DARREL. What right have you to ask these questions?

DETECTIVE. I happen to be in charge of this case, Sir.

DARREL. I've nothing on earth to do with this suicide, and I can't answer you.

DETECTIVE. It's known to us that you've often left this lady close to her house at night. You were with her last evening, and she telephoned to you this morning. It's further known that you used to be a caller here, and ceased to be a year ago. Now, Sir, you received a letter from Major Morecombe this morning. . . .

DARREL. I did not.

DETECTIVE. Excuse me!

DARREL. I tell you I did *not.*

DETECTIVE. He wrote and posted one just before he committed suicide, and we want it.

DARREL. I give you my word of honour I received no such letter.

DETECTIVE. If you did not receive this letter, it will go far to show that your friendship with Mrs. Morecombe was not the cause of the Major's suicide. Do you mind emptying your pockets? Now, Sir, sensibly. If you haven't got it, it can't do you any harm.

DARREL *empties his pockets.* *The* DETECTIVE *glances at the letters.*

As a matter of form, Sir. [*He runs his hands skilfully over* DARREL] Very good! I took the Constable round to your place, and he identified you by a photograph.

DARREL. What! You broke in?

DETECTIVE. [*With a smile*] You see, I didn't know when I'd get you, and I've no time to waste.

DARREL. This is an outrage!

DETECTIVE. Well, not exactly, Sir; no. There's

just one thing I brought away that I'd like you to open for me. [*He goes to the door and calls*] Simpson!

The CONSTABLE *appears with a locked japanned box.*

DARREL. This is abominable!

DETECTIVE. [*Taking the box—to* CONSTABLE] This *is* the gentleman?

CONSTABLE. Yes, Sir.

DETECTIVE. That'll do, then!

[*The* CONSTABLE *goes out.*

DARREL. Give me that box.

DETECTIVE. Yes, Sir; I want you to open it.

DARREL. I shall do nothing of the sort.

DETECTIVE. Then I must force the lock.

DARREL. [*At his wits' end*] Look here, this is a horrible business for everyone. Surely you don't want to make it worse? I've given you my solemn word.

DETECTIVE. A gentleman will always give that, Sir, to save a lady. Kindly unlock it. [*Holds out the box.*]

DARREL. My friendship for Mrs. Morecombe has nothing to do with this suicide. Major Morecombe didn't know of it; if he had, he wouldn't have cared —they were quite apart.

DETECTIVE. Exactly; and if you'll excuse me, I think you're the reason of that.

DARREL. I am *not.*

DETECTIVE. Then what is?

DARREL. I don't know.

DETECTIVE. In my opinion, the letter I want will tell us.

DARREL. [*Passionately*] I have had no letter.

DETECTIVE. We shall see that.

DARREL. [*Seizing the box*] Shall we?

But as he speaks ANNE *comes from where she has been standing, motionless.*

ANNE. [*Very calmly to the* DETECTIVE] That's enough. You are quite right. We are lovers.

[*The* DETECTIVE *makes her a little bow.*

But you'll serve no purpose by making that public: you'll only cause my father great sorrow. Isn't it all painful enough without?

DETECTIVE. [*Uncomfortable*] That's as may be, Ma'am. But a matter like this has to be cleared up.

ANNE. Why?

DETECTIVE. The law takes no account of privacy when a thing like this happens.

DARREL. The law! It's got no guts.

DETECTIVE. Very sensibly said, Sir. Kindly open this box.

DARREL. It contains nothing but private letters from this lady to me.

DETECTIVE. Well, we'll just confirm that.

ANNE. Open it, Geof.

DETECTIVE. That's right, Ma'am; in view of your admission, there's every chance we shan't need them. They shall be kept under seal, and returned.

DARREL, *taking a key from his watch-chain, opens the little box. The* DETECTIVE *takes out a packet of letters. From the first he*

takes a dried flower and puts it carefully back into the box. The TWO LOVERS *have unconsciously clasped hands, watching the* DETECTIVE *rapidly turning over letter after letter to see that they are all in the same handwriting.*

DETECTIVE. All correct, Sir. You'd like to seal them up yourself, no doubt.

DARREL *has wrenched his hand from* ANNE'S, *and covered his eyes. She goes to the bureau and taking a large envelope hands it to the* DETECTIVE, *who puts the letters in and closes it.*

DARREL. Why do you take them, if you're not going to use them?

DETECTIVE. Well, Sir, we shan't use them unless Mrs. Morecombe contradicts the statement she made just now. To have them will remove that temptation. You shall have them back, Sir, just as they are, if you'll put your seal on them. [*He lays the envelope on the bureau.* DARREL *seals it.*]

DARREL. Will you let me attend the inquest instead of her?

DETECTIVE. [*Placing the envelope in his breast pocket*] Out of the question, Sir. [*Points to the chair*] She found the body.

DARREL. The whole thing's inhuman.

DETECTIVE. Well, Sir, there it is. . . . Off the carpet, and you never know where you'll land. But you can trust me.

DARREL. Will you give me your card, please?

The DETECTIVE *hands him a card, and the little box, empty of all except the flower.*

DETECTIVE. You persist in saying you got no letter from Major Morecombe this morning, Sir?

DARREL. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Well, I hope we shall get hold of it. [*Looking at his face intently*] And I sincerely trust we shan't need——

[ANNE *moves a step, looking at him.*

[*With a gesture of discomfort*] My duty, Ma'am.

[*He goes out. The door is shut.*

The TWO LOVERS *stand side by side without a word.*

DARREL. [*Suddenly*] What could I have done?

ANNE. [*Taking his hand*] Nothing, Geof. Don't look like that. It's just fatality. I must tell Father now. How horrible for him, how horrible! He'll never understand!

DARREL. Wait, darling. There's always a chance. This letter——

ANNE. He gave one to Ellen to post, it seems, just before——

DARREL. You say he had someone?

ANNE. But who? We never asked each other anything. That was agreed. The letter may have been to his mother, of course.

There is a knock. The door is opened by the REPORTER.

REPORTER. Could I speak to you again for just one

minute, Mrs. Morecombe? I'm afraid I must seem very intrusive——

ANNE. Yes. [*The* REPORTER *stands embarrassed, looking from one to the other*] Well?

REPORTER. It's just this. Did you know that a young woman came to your house this morning, in a state of great distress?

ANNE. A young——! [*She and* DARREL *exchange a glance*] No.

REPORTER. Perhaps it may throw some light— [*He has noted their glance, and looks from one to the other*] Luckily I had a friend, who followed her.

ANNE. [*Suddenly*] Are you going to drag another wretched woman into this?

REPORTER. [*Nonplussed*] Well, you see, she was in such a state.

ANNE. Do you want to make it worse?

REPORTER. No, indeed! Only, of course—— Then you *can't* tell me anything about her?

ANNE. I know nothing of her.

REPORTER. Thank you very much. That simplifies things, anyway. I wanted to be sure. I'm very much obliged to you. Good morning.

ANNE. [*Suddenly*] My husband has a mother, to whom he was a hero.

REPORTER. Oh! Could you give me her address?

ANNE. She's in the country. She must be broken-hearted. She adored him. Don't you realise?

REPORTER. Yes, indeed. It's a terrible drama.

DARREL. [*Grimly*] Perhaps you'd like to ask why *I'm* here?

REPORTER. Oh! no, thank you. I can—er—imagine.

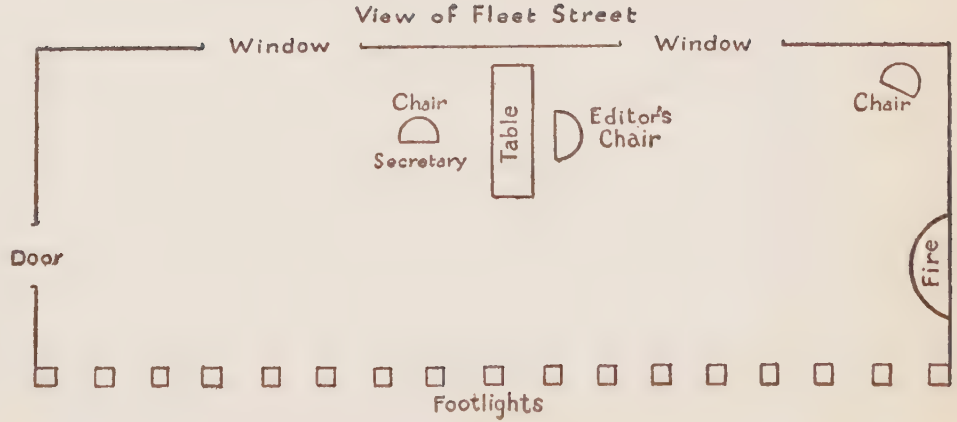
[*He goes out.*

DARREL. My God!

[ANNE *is standing motionless.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II


View of Fleet Street
Window
Window
Chair
Secretary
Table
Editor's Chair
Chair
Door
Fire
Footlights

ACT II

SCENE I

The Editor's room, at the offices of "The Evening Sun," on the following morning. The room, moderately snug, is longish and narrow, the windows at the back have a view of Fleet Street. Right, Forward, there is a door. A large bureau stands between the windows. Left, is a fireplace.

The EDITOR *is sitting at the bureau with his back to the fireplace. He is about fifty, short, with an involuted and ironical face and quick eyes. He is dictating to his secretary, a fresh-faced girl.*

EDITOR. "The object is good, of course; but in order to strike a note with the public, a much bigger name is required." Umm! it's a pity—the really valuable names are in prison. Whom do you suggest, Miss Price? [*Checking her at the first movement of her lips*] No, no! *Not* a novelist—the public are fed up with novelists. Isn't there a cleric?

SECRETARY. Well, of course, there's——

EDITOR. Oh! Not him! These humanitarian stunts depend on a touch of novelty. How about a judge. Well—it doesn't press. I want to see the News Editor.

SECRETARY. Yes, Mr. Eagles; he's waiting. [*Goes to the door and says*] Will you come in, Mr. Kenting?

The NEWS EDITOR *enters: he is of a brisk, rather sandy type, with a short-clipped moustache, and a pipe in his hand.*

EDITOR. Morning, Kenting. [*He takes up a copy of yesterday's issue*] That'll do, Miss Price.

[*She goes out, with a pile of finished letters.*

Look here! Who passed this paragraph on the Morecombe suicide—about a young woman calling at the house in a state of distress?

NEWS ED. I did.

EDITOR. I don't like it.

NEWS ED. What's wrong?

EDITOR. Suggestive.

NEWS ED. *He* can't bring a libel action—poor chap.

EDITOR. No; but we shall have the police round about it.

NEWS ED. Well, it's all to our credit; they wouldn't have got hold of it without.

EDITOR. Yes; but this thing is *sub judice.*

NEWS ED. Not yet.

EDITOR. That's all very well, Kenting, but you can't be too careful. Who was the reporter?

NEWS ED. Young Forman's on it. He's a very decent chap—there's no name given. I've got to get news. This Morecombe suicide is bound to make a stir. He bombed farther into Germany than any flying man we had.

EDITOR. Exactly! But this is going to hurt his people.

NEWS ED. Well! Foreman says the police are running *Mrs.* Morecombe's private life.

EDITOR. Oh! When's the inquest?

NEWS ED. To-morrow.

[*The* SECRETARY *enters with a card.*

EDITOR. [*After glancing at it, makes a face, and hands it to* KENTING] Here we are, you see.

NEWS ED. [*Reading*] *Lady* Morecombe. Who's that —his mother?

EDITOR. Show her in, Miss Price. This is up to you, Kenting.

They stand at attention. LADY MORECOMBE *is a little grey-haired lady in black, wiry and of a Highland type. The contrast between her little figure and the tall form of* COLONEL ROLAND, *who accompanies her, is striking.*

LADY M. Give me that paper, Colonel Roland. [*Taking a newspaper from* COLONEL ROLAND'S *hand*] Are you the editor?

EDITOR. Yes.

LADY M. [*With intense suppressed feeling*] Why do you put this about my son?

EDITOR. We were just discussing that, Lady Morecombe. This is the news editor, Mr. Kenting.

LADY M. Is it you who are responsible?

NEWS ED. I passed it. What do you object to, Ma'am? It's a fact.

LADY M. "A young woman in great distress"! It suggests—suggests—! I was in the country when I

had this awful news. I come up; and this is the first thing I see.

News Ed. It's quite vague—no name—might be anyone.

Lady M. Don't you know people better than that? The worst construction, of course, will be put.

News Ed. Very sorry if it hurts you, Lady Morecombe; but you don't realise, I'm afraid, that an inquest makes everything public. We're merely helping to get at the truth as quickly as possible.

Lady M. The truth? What is that to you?

Editor. Immense subject, that, Lady Morecombe. The Press is the chief safeguard against injustice of all sorts. Secret enquiries are to no one's interest in the long run.

Lady M. [*With passion*] That is cant. You want to sell your paper. And because of that, my son, who can't defend himself, is to be blackened—his affairs hawked about on the street.

Editor. [*With a sort of dignity*] It's hardly as simple as that. We do want to sell our paper, of course. A Press that doesn't pay its way, can't live. But if there's a villain in the piece, it's the Public, Lady Morecombe—not us.

Lady M. Will you contradict this paragraph?

Editor. I appreciate your feelings, but I assure you it would serve no purpose. The inquest will bring out every circumstance, and more, that concerns your son's death.

Lady M. But for your meddling, this would never have been known.

EDITOR. [*Subtly*] You admit it, then?

LADY M. I admit nothing against my son; he was a hero.

EDITOR. Quite! But don't you want to know the reason of his suicide?

LADY M. It is known to God.

EDITOR. Ah! I'm afraid He will keep it to Himself. If no one else is to know, the blame may be wrongly assigned. I am told, for instance, that the police believe it to be due to Mrs. Morecombe's conduct.

COL. ROLAND. What?

EDITOR. I beg your pardon.

COL. ROLAND. That lady is my daughter, Sir. Be good enough to explain yourself.

[*The* EDITOR *looks at the* NEWS EDITOR.

NEWS ED. You'll find that the police are following a clue in that direction.

COL. ROLAND. What devil's gossip's this? Speak out!

NEWS ED. Entirely in confidence—that is the line they're going on. Our reporter——

COL. ROLAND. Ah! What d'you mean by sending people to meddle with private affairs?

NEWS ED. [*Angrily*] That's not the way to——

EDITOR. One moment, Kenting. [*He sounds a bell*] Forman, you said?

KENTING *nods sullenly.* *The* SECRETARY *has appeared.*

EDITOR. Miss Price, if Mr. Forman's in, ask him to come here. [*She goes.*

Waynesburg College Library

EDITOR. Now, excuse me, all this is very human, but we should be glad of civility. It's often very difficult to decide between private susceptibilities and our duty to the Public.

COL. ROLAND. What concern is it of the Public? What business have you to feed their confounded curiosity? Thank God, there's a law of libel!

NEWS ED. Yes; but it won't lie against the police. *We* haven't said anything about your daughter.

EDITOR. This shows you, Lady Morecombe, how important it is that everything should be known, if the real truth is to come out.

Before LADY MORECOMBE *can answer, the* REPORTER *enters.*

EDITOR. Mr. Forman, I understand you have the Morecombe case in hand. Here are Major Morecombe's mother and Mrs. Morecombe's father

REPORTER. Yes, Sir. [*He bows.*]

COL. ROLAND. What have you been saying about my daughter?

REPORTER. [*Uneasy*] Well, Sir, after I saw you, I had a question to put to Mrs. Morecombe about the young woman who came there yesterday morning——

LADY M. [*Breaking in*] It's you, then, who are responsible for this calumny on my son?

REPORTER. [*With a glance at* KENTING] Really, I simply carry out my orders.

COL. ROLAND. What did you tell your chief about my daughter?

REPORTER. Merely what I gathered from my own observation. There's nothing about that in the paper.

LADY M. Why did you invent that lie about this woman?

REPORTER. [*Angry*] Lie! She was Major Morecombe's mistress, by her own account.

LADY M. [*Mastering herself again*] If she was, what has that to do with his death?

NEWS ED. That, I take it, will be for the Jury.

LADY M. Will you give me her address, please?

REPORTER. [*To the* EDITOR] Am I to give it, Sir?

EDITOR. Yes.

REPORTER. Miss Odiham, 48 Burdells Buildings, Fulham.

LADY M. [*Writing it down*] Are you coming, Colonel Roland?

COL. ROLAND. Just a moment. [*To* EDITOR] Do I understand, Sir, that your paper will make no further allusion to this death except to report the inquest?

EDITOR. [*After a moment's pause*] To give you that assurance would be to admit my paper in the wrong, which I am far from doing. I must be guided by events.

LADY M. It's ghoulish—ghoulish!

[*She turns and goes out.*

COL. ROLAND. You had better give me that assurance.

EDITOR. No, Sir. The Press is not to be abused and hectored in this manner.

COL. ROLAND. Very well. I shall go straight to my lawyers.

[*He follows* LADY MORECOMBE *out.*

EDITOR. This'll never do. If they get hold of the girl and spirit her away, we shan't be able to substantiate our paragraph. We must keep the whip hand. Mr. Forman, cut off at once and get her away yourself.

REPORTER. If I can, Sir.

[*He goes out.*

EDITOR. What a little tigress! And that old Irish-Indian!

NEWS ED. Peppery devil!

EDITOR. They seem to think one *wants* to hurt their feelings.

[*The* SECRETARY *enters.*

SECRETARY. Detective-Inspector Flayne, from Scotland Yard, wishes to see you, Mr. Eagles.

EDITOR. [*Groans*] What did I tell you, Kenting? Bring him in.

The DETECTIVE *enters. He looks from one to the other.*

DETECTIVE. I've called about your paragraph on the Morecombe suicide, Sir.

EDITOR. Yes?

DETECTIVE. What's this about a girl?

EDITOR. Well, Inspector, we have some news that you haven't, as yet.

DETECTIVE. Excuse my saying so, but this is entirely a matter for the police. We don't want any interference. If you wish to give me your informa-

tion, you can; otherwise I'm afraid we shall have to get an attachment for contempt.

EDITOR. I don't think you can. The matter's not yet *sub judice.*

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] We shall see that.

EDITOR. We have our duty to the Public as well as to you, Inspector. This is a mysterious business, and Morecombe was the best-known flying man we had, far and away.

DETECTIVE. Am I to have that young woman's name and address?

EDITOR. Well, we want to give you every assistance. But I think we're entitled to a little kudos, Inspector.

DETECTIVE. Now, Sir. Hindering the law——

EDITOR. Helping. In return for this information —favoured nation terms in regard to anything you give out to the Press—eh?

DETECTIVE. All right. That's understood.

EDITOR. Give him the address, Kenting.

NEWS ED. Daisy Odiham, 48 Burdells Buildings, Fulham.

DETECTIVE. [*Entering it in his notebook*] Thank you. Good morning.

[*He goes out.*

NEWS ED. [*Again looking at his watch*] If Forman's smart, all our friends will find the bird flown. What then?

EDITOR. We'll see. I'm just a little fed up, Kenting. The Press gets all the blame for the natural instincts of mankind. I don't care what they say,

curiosity is the greatest thing in the world; I'm quite keen myself to know why Morecombe committed suicide. I suppose he *did?*

NEWS ED. Yes. No improving on that.

EDITOR. [*Following out his own line of thought*] Someone's got to stand up for the man in the street. Why shouldn't he know? News—so long as it's true. I'm not going to be dictated to by those people. Go ahead as if they didn't exist. Ordinary discretion and decency, of course. We'll produce the girl if the police want her. But it does them no harm to know that we're more spry than they are. That's all now, Kenting. Send in Miss Price again, will you?

As the NEWS EDITOR *turns to go out, he reseats himself and turns over some papers.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

A little later, the same morning.

The Morecombes's Study, still curtained, with daylight coming through the curtains in narrow streaks.

As the curtain goes up, the MAID *enters, turning up the light and showing in* MR. ODIHAM *and his* DAUGHTER. *The girl is drooping, and seems to have been crying. Her father is a short man of the house-painter type, with all the oddity and reserved judgments of the cockney workman.*

MAID. Mrs. Morecombe's at lunch. What name shall I tell her?

ODIHAM. Odiham. [*He pronounces it Oddium*] And make it special, if it's all the same to you.

The MAID *goes out. The* TWO *stand disconsolate.*

DAISY. [*Suddenly*] Oh! Daddy, I can't bear to see her!

ODIHAM. Come now, Daisy; she won't eat you. If they'd done with each other, as you keep tellin' me——

DAISY. Oh! They had—they had!

ODIHAM. Perk up, then, and let's put the hat on it. It's the only way to stop these noospaper chaps.

[*He takes a folded paper out of his side pocket.* ANNE *enters.*]

ANNE. Yes? You wanted to see me?

[*The* GIRL *gasps.*

ODIHAM. That's right, Ma'am. You're keepin' well, I 'ope? [*Smoothing his trousers*] P'r'aps I oughtn't to 'a brought my daughter 'ere, but fact is—when you can't get out of a thing, you've got to face it.

ANNE. [*Looking intently at the* GIRL] I see.

ODIHAM. Did you notice this in yesterday's *Evenin'*, Ma'am?

ANNE. [*Taking the newspaper*] Yes.

ODIHAM. I get it every day with my supper. Of course, when I read it last night, I'd no idea it was my daughter. I just 'appened to show it to 'er, an' that fetched it all out of 'er sudden—about 'er and your 'usband, Ma'am. First I knew of it, an' that's the truth. And of course as to what you know, I can't tell.

ANNE. Nothing.

ODIHAM. Dear, dear! Well, I always say—When you once begin to tell the truth, it don't do to stop sudden. There's no denyin' the liaison, it seems. Of course 'er mother was Irish, an' brought 'er up too strict. And bein' in a restaurant, she's liable to admiration. But I never dreamed of 'er 'avin' a private life, and I can only ask you to look over it.

ANNE. [*Coldly*] There's no need.

ODIHAM. You see, this noospaper 'ints that "the girl in distress," as they call 'er 'ere, is the cause of

the catastrofe. And, of course, she tells me she ain't. Daisy, tell the lady about what you told me about when you saw the Major last.

ANNE. Yes, tell me.

DAISY. [*Choking a little, but mastering her voice*] Oh, Madam, I—I saw him the evening before—he—he—. He took me down to Richmond. Madam, I'm *sure* I'm not the cause of—of what happened. He was just as nice as ever he could be, and I—I didn't give him any—trouble, ever. We never—never had any words. [*She covers her face; recovering with a brusque movement*] I was too fond of him. I *adored* him. I wouldn't ever have given him any trouble.

ANNE. [*Quietly*] You came here yesterday morning, didn't you?

DAISY. I was crazy; and as I went away a man followed me. He told me he'd have to tell the police if I didn't give him the truth. I lost my head, and I don't know what I said. And then they go and put this in the paper. There was no call for anything to come out about me. Oh! if I've done him a mischief! I wouldn't have hurt him for the world! [*She masters herself with difficulty.*]

ODIHAM. [*With heat*] Ah! You don't know where to have these noospaper fellers, they're all over it. There's another after 'er now—wants 'er to go away an' 'ide 'erself. I said to him: "What game is this? She's got nothin' to do with this tradegy." But 'e kept on, till I thought to meself: "I got to stop this, some'ow. The only way is to go to 'eadquarters."

I didn't like to bring her 'ere, but I 'ave. And, what's more, I believe 'e's followed us.

ANNE. I'm sure he has.

ODIHAM. He'd better watch it. My girl may 'ave done wrong, but she's a good girl, and I stand by her. From what she says, she ain't accessory to the fact, and if you'd just tell this feller the reason of your 'usband's havin' done what he did, Ma'am—and stop 'em gluin' their noses to the shop winder.

ANNE. I don't know the reason.

ODIHAM. [*Blank*] Aow! "Veiled in mystery." I thought, as the paper said that, you'd be *sure* to know reely. [*Scratching his head*] Well, some'ow it's got to be stopped. 'Er name ain't mentioned yet.

ANNE. My father, and my husband's mother have gone down to the office of this newspaper; but I'm afraid it's too late. The police will have seen this paragraph, and follow it up, I suppose.

ODIHAM. [*With anger*] Call that English! It's a terrible thing for my girl, if they're goin' to make 'er public.

ANNE. It's terrible for us all, Mr.——

ODIHAM. Oddium.

ANNE. [*To the* GIRL] Did you get a letter from Major Morecombe this morning?

DAISY. No. And he never said good-bye special when I left him on Sunday. I can't hardly believe he's gone.

ANNE. Can you think of *any* reason?

DAISY. [*Shaking her head*] No! Only sometimes he'd be silent suddenly, and look——

ANNE. Yes.

ODIHAM. Savin' your presence, Ma'am, I don't think a man's the right to leave everybody like this gapin' for news of why; I don't, reely.

ANNE. It seems he wrote a letter, but to whom we don't know; it might throw light if we could trace it.

ODIHAM. Ah! well—it's a warnin' against 'avin' a private life.

[*The* MAID *enters.*

MAID. That young man from the newspaper wants to see this—gentleman again.

ODIHAM. Ah! I thought he'd bob up.

ANNE. Do you wish to see him, Mr. Odiham?

ODIHAM. [*Shifting from foot to foot*] Reely, Ma'am, it's so noo to me—all this. Would you advise me to?

ANNE. Perhaps you'd better. Ask him to come in, Ellen.

ELLEN *opens the door, and the* REPORTER *enters.*

REPORTER. [*To* ANNE] How do you do, Ma'am? Please forgive me—but my paper is so anxious to minimise any consequences of that paragraph.

ODIHAM. [*Sullenly*] You should 'a thought o' that before. What call 'ad you? I've always read your paper and enjoyed it.

REPORTER. Exactly, Mr. Odiham.

ODIHAM. [*Agape*] 'Ow's that?

REPORTER. If you didn't enjoy cases like this, we shouldn't put them in, you know.

ODIHAM. Aow!

REPORTER. But you've changed your mind, I hope. Do let me see that Miss Odiham goes into the country quietly till the inquest's over. That's the only way to keep her out of it all.

ODIHAM. And what about her job?

REPORTER. She could be indisposed. We pay all expenses.

ODIHAM. What do you say, Daisy?

DAISY. Oh! Yes, yes.

REPORTER. Come along, then, at once. We'll send your things down after you this afternoon.

ODIHAM. [*With sudden distrust*] 'Ow am I to know you're on the square?

REPORTER. [*With a disarming gesture, very simply and nicely*] Mr. Odiham, anyone can see that your daughter is very—sad. I really am quite a decent chap.

ANNE. You can trust him.

REPORTER. Thank you.

But as he speaks, the door, Left, is opened, and LADY MORECOMBE *and* COLONEL ROLAND *come in and stand, taking in the situation.*

LADY M. Is this the young woman?

ANNE. Yes.

LADY M. [*To the* GIRL] We have been to your address.

ANNE. They came here to see if anything could be done.

LADY M. [*To the* REPORTER] And you?

REPORTER. I was told to try and prevent things going further, Lady Morecombe.

LADY M. [*Advancing—to the* GIRL] Is it true, as this man says, that you were my son's——?

DAISY. [*Very low*] Yes.

LADY M. Is it true that he did this because of you?

DAISY [*Louder*] No.

LADY M. [*To the* REPORTER, *who is about to speak*] You hear that? Leave us, please.

REPORTER. I regret——

LADY M. Regret what sells your paper? Never!

REPORTER. Forgive me, that's very unfair. I hate this sort of thing as much as you, but I can't help the public taste. Ask Mr. Odiham, ask anybody!

[*He goes out, Left.*

COL. ROLAND. [*Crossing the room*] Anne, I want to speak to you.

[*He takes her arm and they go out, Right.*

LADY M. Did you take my son away from his wife?

DAISY. No! Oh, no!

LADY M. What are you?

ODIHAM. I'd be obliged if you wouldn't tease 'er, Ma'am. She's 'ad a great shock.

LADY M. So have I.

ODIHAM. Excuse me, that ought to give you a fellow-feelin'.

DAISY. I'd have done anything for him.

LADY M. [*More softly*] I am an old woman, in great grief. I only want the truth, so as to know how best to serve my son's memory.

DAISY. Tell me what to do, and I'll do it, if I can.

ODIHAM. We're all in the same cart, I think.

LADY M. You're right. Will you deny your relationship to my son?

ODIHAM. [*Scratching his head*] Perjury? That's awk!

LADY M. Is it known to anyone except that newspaper man?

DAISY. Not of my telling.

ODIHAM. You can't keep them sort of things dark if the police get after it. To be irregular's one thing; but to swear you ain't if you are, is askin' for trouble.

LADY M. How long had you known my son?

DAISY. Nearly a year.

LADY M. Had you an allowance from him?

DAISY. Never. It was for love.

LADY M. Will you go quietly away by yourself at once?

DAISY. Oh! yes.

But as she speaks, COLONEL ROLAND *returns by the door, Right. He is extremely grave.*

LADY M. [*To him*] She will go away at once.

COL. ROLAND. Impossible.

LADY M. Why?

He shakes his head. LADY MORECOMBE, *after staring at him, speaks to the Odihams.*

Will you wait a minute or two in the dining-room opposite.

[*The* ODIHAMS *go out, Left.*

Why not, Colonel Roland?

COL. ROLAND. Anne.

LADY M. Unfaithful?——

COL. ROLAND. Colin and Anne went their own ways. But Colin had this girl; Anne's conduct could

have had no bearing on his death. If the police know the whole, they will see that.

LADY M. You mean to give them this girl's name? [COLONEL ROLAND *nods*] It's treachery to the dead.

COL. ROLAND. I can't have Anne disgraced.

LADY M. Does she *want* Colin's name blackened?

COL. ROLAND. No. But Anne's all I've got. To have her tarred and feathered before my eyes!

LADY M. And I? [*With emotion*] Isn't it enough that my boy is dead?

She places her hand on the door just as the MAID *comes in.*

MAID. The detective, my lady. Shall I tell the mistress?

LADY M. [*In alarm*] *Where?*

MAID. In the hall, my lady.

LADY M. And those people?

MAID. In the dining-room.

LADY M. Has he seen them?

MAID. I don't think so, my lady.

LADY M. Bring him in here at once:

[*The* MAID *goes.*

Colonel Roland! You won't tell him—you can't!

COLONEL ROLAND *throws his head back and stands very still. The* DETECTIVE *comes in briskly.*

DETECTIVE. Lady Morecombe. Your service. Colonel Roland, I believe? I've come to see your daughter, Sir.

COL. ROLAND. I'll fetch her. [*He goes out, Right.*

DETECTIVE. Sad business, my lady. Can you tell me of anything that bears on it?

LADY M. Nothing.

DETECTIVE. You had no letter from your son?

LADY M. No.

DETECTIVE. Are you staying here?

LADY M. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Possibly you'd like to withdraw; it must all be very trying.

LADY M. No, thank you. I'll stay.

DETECTIVE. As you wish, my lady. But it may be a bit painful for you.

LADY M. I am used to pain.

DETECTIVE. [*As* ANNE *and her* FATHER *come in, Right*] Excuse me, Major Morecombe never had shell-shock, had he?

LADY M. No; but he went through every horror in the war.

DETECTIVE. [*Soberly*] We all did that. [*Turning to* ANNE] I've received information, Mrs. Morecombe, that a young woman called here the morning after the event, in great distress. I have her address, but before I see her, I'd like to ask you what you know about the matter. [*From his central position he loses no gesture, neither the assenting movement of* COLONEL ROLAND'S *head, nor* LADY MORECOMBE'S *intense rigidity, nor* ANNE'S *compressed lips.*]

ANNE. Nothing.

DETECTIVE. Not aware of any reason why she should have come?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. Never saw her?

Again he misses nothing—neither COLONEL ROLAND'S *jerked-up hand, nor* LADY MORECOMBE'S *quick turn and look at* ANNE, *nor the droop of* ANNE'S *eyes, raised again as she speaks.*

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. This is a delicate matter, but I'd like a frank answer from someone. No knowledge of any intimacy between Major Morecombe and this young woman? [*To* ANNE] Madam?

ANNE. No.

DETECTIVE. [*To* LADY MORECOMBE] My lady?

LADY M. No.

DETECTIVE. [*To* COLONEL ROLAND] You, Sir?

There is a moment of suspense—a tiny shake of ANNE'S *head, a movement of* LADY MORECOMBE'S *hands.*

COL. ROLAND. [*After a long breath, with eyes almost closed*] No. [*A moment's silence.*]

DETECTIVE. In that case, as they're in the dining-room, I'll have her and her father in. [*He watches the sensation*] Kindly send for her, Madam.

ANNE *moves to the bell by the fireplace.* COLONEL ROLAND *takes a long breath of relief.*

LADY M. Leave my son alone!

DETECTIVE. [*Quietly*] My Lady!

LADY MORECOMBE, *clasping her little thin hands together, sways slightly; then sinks down on to the chair at the bureau.*

[*The* MAID *enters, Left.*

ANNE. Ask Mr. and Miss Odiham to come in.

[*The* MAID *goes out.*

DETECTIVE. I quite understand your reluctance, but, you'll excuse me—we want the truth.

ODIHAM *and his* DAUGHTER *come in from the Hall. The* DETECTIVE *looks shrewdly at the girl, and beckons her up to him.*

DETECTIVE. I'm the detective in charge of this matter. Your name is Daisy Odiham, of 48 Burdells Buildings?

DAISY. Yes.

Her FATHER *closes up to her;* COLONEL ROLAND *is at the fireplace;* ANNE *by the armchair.*

DETECTIVE. You came here yesterday morning?

DAISY, *whose eyes move restlessly, is silent.* Answer, please.

DAISY. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Why?

DAISY. I was upset.

DETECTIVE. By what?

ODIHAM. [*Stepping forward*] What d'you want to worry my girl for? She knows nothin' o' this.

DETECTIVE. We shall see. [*To* DAISY] You heard of this death—what was it to you?

DAISY. It's cruel. [*She suddenly covers her face.*]

ODIHAM. What do you call this? I tell you she knows nothing of why the Major shot hisself.

DETECTIVE. She'll have to answer on oath to-morrow in the box, unless she answers me now. [*To* DAISY] Come! What was the Major's death to you?

DAISY. [*Freeing her face and flinging out the word*] The world!

DETECTIVE. You mean *he* was the world?

DAISY. Yes.

DETECTIVE. And you to him?

LADY M. [*Sharply*] Only my son could answer that.

DETECTIVE. [*Staring steadily at* DAISY] She knows what I mean. Were you?

DAISY. [*Stony of a sudden*] No.

The gestures of surprise from ANNE *and* COLONEL ROLAND, LADY MORECOMBE'S *relief, and* ODIHAM'S *uneasiness—the* DETECTIVE *marks them all.*

DETECTIVE. When did you see the Major last?

DAISY. The day before he——

DETECTIVE. Where?

DAISY. At Richmond.

DETECTIVE. Now come—speak the truth—you were on terms with him?

DAISY. No.

DETECTIVE. [*With a faint smile*] And yet he was the world to you. What are you?

DAISY. [*Sullenly*] Waitress.

DETECTIVE. Respectable profession. You were pursuing this gentleman, then?

DAISY. I loved him.

DETECTIVE. With no result?

DAISY. I won't be questioned any more.

DETECTIVE. [*Soothingly*] Now, now!

ODIHAM *edges closer to his daughter and pulls her sleeve.*

Ah! *You* understand that it's no good telling lies to the Law. Your daughter was the Major's—— Come, it's only fair to everyone, out with it!

ODIHAM. Can't you see she's 'ighsterical?

DETECTIVE. [*To* DAISY] Give me the letter you had from Major Morecombe yesterday morning.

DAISY. I never had one.

DETECTIVE. What? When it gave you the news that brought you round here?

DAISY. It's a lie! I read it in the paper.

DETECTIVE. [*For the first time sharply*] Don't speak to me like that, my girl. Just answer my questions, and give me that letter.

DAISY. Oh! Won't somebody help me?

COL. ROLAND. [*With a step forward*] Leave the wretched girl alone! [*In a tone of old days*] Do you hear me, Inspector?

DETECTIVE. Yes, Sir; but we're not in the Army now. And, excuse my saying so, it's not to your interest, or to your daughter's, that she should refuse to answer me.

LADY M. [*Rising*] She *has* answered you. What she has said she will repeat on oath. She admired my son—many did—she loved him, if you like. And —that—is—all. [*She says this with such incision and finality that the* DETECTIVE *is for the moment thoroughly taken aback.*]

DETECTIVE. Tell me why your son committed suicide, and I will leave it at that, my lady.

LADY M. I *cannot;* but you will leave it at that, all the same.

DETECTIVE. [*Recovering himself*] Now, this is all very natural, no doubt, but it gets us no further. [*To the* GIRL] I'll give you a last chance. If you aren't frank, I shall start enquiring, and you best know how that'll suit you.

DAISY. [*With sudden passion*] I won't tell you a thing—not a thing—not if ever so! I won't say a word to hurt him!

ODIHAM. [*Warningly*] Daisy!

DAISY. Well, I won't. He's dead.

LADY MORECOMBE puts her little thin hand on the girl's arm and gives it a squeeze.

DETECTIVE. [*Impassively*] That's the Law defied, if ever I heard it.

COL. ROLAND. "De mortuis nil nisi bonum," Sergeant.

DETECTIVE. Precisely, Colonel; I know the saying. But it's my business to put the case up to the Coroner with every circumstance that'll throw light on this death. [*He crosses to the door, opens it and says*] Simpson, ask that reporter to come in.

ODIHAM. Why, this is the ruddy Inquisition! Come along, Daisy!

DETECTIVE. [*Calmly*] You can go, but your daughter can't.

As he speaks, the REPORTER *comes in. The* DETECTIVE *stands with his back to the door.*

DETECTIVE. Kindly repeat to me what you said just now when I questioned you in the street.

The REPORTER, *who is pivoting, and trying to take in the sense of the situation, fronts the* DETECTIVE.

REPORTER. But why, Inspector? It's painful, and perfectly well known to everyone here.

LADY M. Haven't *you* finished mischief-making?

DETECTIVE. Just repeat it. Was this girl Major Morecombe's mistress?

REPORTER. [*Resentful of* LADY MORECOMBE'S *words*] She told our representative so yesterday.

DETECTIVE. [*To the* GIRL] Do you still deny it?

[DAISY *has closed her eyes and sways.*

ANNE. [*Crossing swiftly*] She's going to faint.

LADY M. [*Sharply*] Girl, don't faint!

[*The* GIRL *reopens her eyes.*

DETECTIVE. And you still say you had no letter?

DAISY. [*In a dead voice*] I had no letter.

DETECTIVE. [*To* ODIHAM] You can take her away now. [*To the* REPORTER] You can go too. But mind! Anyone who plays tricks with her before the inquest will be up against it. Unless I'm given that letter, she'll have to go into the box.

ODIHAM. Well, you are a blanky bloke!

DETECTIVE. Thank you.

The ODIHAMS *go out,* ODIHAM *half carrying his daughter. The* REPORTER *stands uncertain, but at a sharp motion of the* DETECTIVE'S *chin, he too goes.*

DETECTIVE. She had that letter right enough.

[*Turning sharply to* ANNE] Unless *you* can tell me who had it now, Ma'am. You've all had time to think things over.

ANNE. Mr. Darrel received no letter.

DETECTIVE. Well, I've made every enquiry about the Major's affairs. There's nothing wrong anywhere. Bank balance good, no recent sale of securities; no debts to speak of. No monetary complications of any sort; no ill-health; and five years since the war. [*To* LADY MORECOMBE] Nothing wrong in your family, my lady?

LADY M. No.

DETECTIVE. So I should say. His father was the great ironmaster, I believe?

LADY M. Yes.

DETECTIVE. Nothing wrong there?

LADY M. I know of nothing.

DETECTIVE. That's how it is, then. We're driven on to private life. [*To* ANNE] Yours, Madam, or his. I don't know how far you've confided in your father?

ANNE. Entirely.

DETECTIVE. I'm glad of that. Well, the day before his death the Major takes this girl to Richmond. And the evening of his death you spend with another gentleman. That's the case, [*With a sharp glance at* LADY MORECOMBE *and* ANNE] apart from the letter.

ANNE. Have you enquired for it?

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] I should say so. Posted in a pillar-box—sorted and sent out at eleven p.m. by

people dying for a sleep—that's a letter that only gets traced on the film, Ma'am.

COL. ROLAND. Anne, go.

ANNE *looks at him, and goes out, Right. The* DETECTIVE *eyes the tall figure to his right, the tiny figure to his left.*

COL. ROLAND. Now, Inspector, you were a soldier —use your reason.

DETECTIVE. Never allowed one in the Army, Sir.

COL. ROLAND. Try it for a change. My son-in-law had this girl, and my daughter's behaviour can have had nothing to do with his death.

LADY M. This poor foolish girl was utterly devoted. She cannot have been the cause.

COL. ROLAND. Neither of them can be. Come, Inspector!

DETECTIVE. You expect me to go up with this case, after two clear days, without a single fact that has any bearing whatever on this suicide of a well-known man? All I can say is, if I stood for that, neither the Coroner nor the Public would.

COL. ROLAND. But why drag in what has no bearing?

DETECTIVE. It's not for me to say what has bearing and what hasn't. You know nothing of inquests, perhaps. The Coroner will ask: When and where did this death take place; by whose hand; if by his own, what was his state of mind at the time? It's his state of mind I have to show to the best of my ability; and these are the only facts I have knowledge of that can have affected him.

LADY M. And will knowing his state of mind console *me?* What will help me, Inspector, is that no one shall think lightly of my son now he's dead.

DETECTIVE. [*With a shrug*] The custom's what it is, my lady. There's a feeling a man shouldn't take his life while he's got his wits.

LADY M. Do these facts of yours point to sound or to unsound mind?

DETECTIVE. That's very clever, my lady.

LADY M. Clever! I've lost my only son. It's like losing my sight. Clever!

DETECTIVE. [*Stubbornly*] I'm sorry. But——

COL. ROLAND. By the Lord, Inspector, I should have thought you more of a man!

DETECTIVE. [*Drily*] Man enough to do my duty, Colonel.

COL. ROLAND. Duty! Wantonly to make a show of this! You see what it means to Lady Morecombe! As for me—I can't tell you what my daughter is to me—to watch her disgraced! One's only daughter pilloried in the papers! The Public all agog! Those women who come and gloat! I'm told there's never a death or a divorce where there isn't a pack o' women in furs and feathers. And this is far worse than a divorce. There was the poor fellow lying dead—when she came in from her . . .

LADY M. Colonel Roland has served the country all his life; he's been wounded three times. And my son was gallantry itself! Do you want to smirch his memory before everybody?

DETECTIVE. [*Moved*] I'm sure I've every feeling for

you both, my lady. These things come very hard on families. But aren't you making too much of it? A little private life in these days—what is it?

LADY M. [*Like a little statue of dignity*] We don't belong to these days. We ought to have been dead. Enough! Colonel Roland, he means to do it: nothing we can say will stop him!

DETECTIVE. [*Quickly*] The Law, my lady, not me. Get me that letter, and it may turn out different.

LADY M. In our belief, neither had the letter.

DETECTIVE. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Take my word for it, one of them had. Well, we've the best part of a day to get it still. Good morning!

The DETECTIVE *bows first to one and then to the other; but neither makes a sign. He makes a vexed movement of his head and goes out. There is a moment's silence.*

COL. ROLAND. Has the girl got it?

LADY M. No: I'm sure she was speaking the truth.

COL. ROLAND. Anne is positive.

LADY M. We're in a net. Colonel Roland, haven't you influence enough to stop this?

COL. ROLAND. I? I'm nobody. On the shelf. I'll try my lawyers, but for the life of me I don't see what they can do.

LADY M. Try! Try everything! Forgive me for what I said!

COL. ROLAND. I know—I know! My poor friend!

He takes her hand and puts it to his lips, passes on and goes out into the hall.

LADY MORECOMBE, *left alone, moves restlessly.*

Hearing the outer door close, she goes to the window, slightly draws back the curtain, and watches his departure, then stands gazing at the armchair, with her hand to her forehead.

ANNE *comes in from Right. She has on a hat and carries a dressing-bag. Seeing her,* LADY MORECOMBE *drops her hand, and reins back from the chair.*

ANNE. I'm going to my father's. You will like to be alone here.

LADY M. I can leave, instead.

ANNE. No. It's Colin's house. [*She is moving on.*]

LADY M. Wait! Was it your doing that you were apart?

ANNE. No.

LADY M. You loved each other when you married.

ANNE. We thought so.

LADY M. Were you the first to be unfaithful?

ANNE. It was not I who broke off our life together.

LADY M. Were there scenes between you?

ANNE. Never.

LADY M. Anne! Are you keeping anything back?

ANNE. Nothing.

LADY M. Do you love this other man?

ANNE. With all my heart.

LADY M. Did Colin love this girl?

ANNE. I can't tell you.

LADY M. Nobody can tell me anything. Oh! God! [*Suddenly*] I suppose you are glad that he is gone?

ANNE. [*Wincing*] That's not fair. You know it's not!

LADY M. The heart is never fair. But you have none, perhaps.

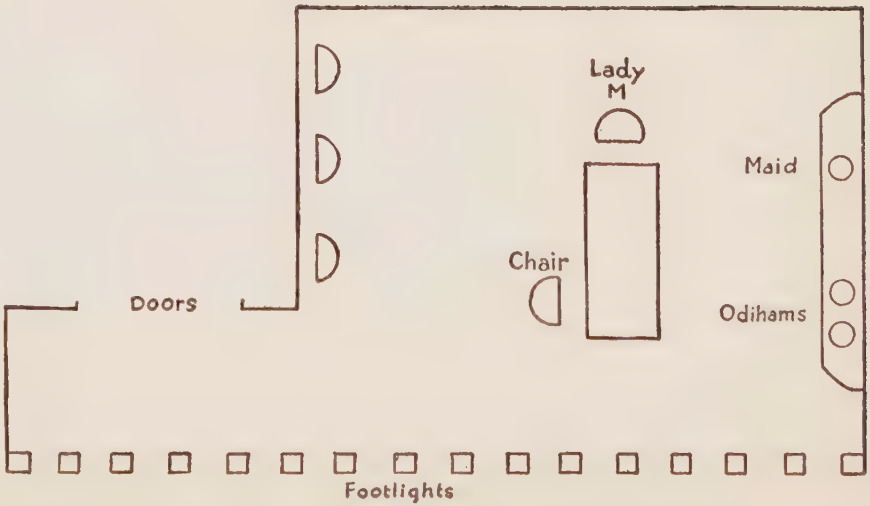
ANNE. I have told you.

There is a long look between them, then ANNE *passes on and out into the hall.*

At the closing of the door, LADY MORECOMBE *moves and turns out the light. A streak of sunlight from where the curtain was left by her half drawn falls across the armchair. She moves into it, standing behind the chair. as if looking down on someone seated there. Slowly her hands go out as if taking a head between them. She bends and presses her lips to the head that she does not hold. There is the sound of a kiss, and very low the word: "Colin!"*

CURTAIN.

ACT III


Lady
M
Maid
Chair
Doors
Odihams
Footlights

ACT III

Just before eleven o'clock the following day.

A waiting-room at the Coroner's Court, rather small, and furnished like a railway station waiting-room, but fresher-looking, having walls of green distemper, with a dado. A narrow oblong table stands parallel to a long seat along the wall, Left. There are some chairs against the right-hand wall, which turns at a right angle, forward, forming an alcove in which, facing the audience, is the wide open doorway leading to lobby, public entrance, and Court. (*See Design.*)

Seated on the long seat are Mr. Odiham *and his* Daughter, *and a little way from them, the maid* Ellen. *At the top of the table, in a chair, sits* Lady Morecombe, *very still and alone. In the alcove and lobby is a bustle of figures, the pivot of which is the Coroner's* Clerk, *a moustachioed man in a gown.*

Coroner's C. Only those interested in the case.

Lady. [*With aigrette*] Oh! but we're very interested. Can't you find us seats?

Coroner's C. Witnesses?

Lady. [*With aigrette, pushing forward a younger*

lady] Not exactly, but my friend is a great friend of Mrs. Morecombe.

CORONER'S C. You can go and try, but the Court's full.

LADY. [*With aigrette*] What a bore! Come along, Ursula! We must get in.

REPORTER. [FORMAN, *showing his card*] Press.

CORONER'S C. All right—room at the table, I think.

The REPORTER *stands a moment looking at the* ODIHAMS; *suddenly he sees* LADY MORECOMBE *beckoning with her black-gloved hand. He goes to her, standing Right of table.*

LADY M. [*Pointing to a paper on the table before her*] Did you put that headline?

REPORTER. I've nothing to do with headlines. Excuse me, I have to get my seat.

He moves quickly back, and encounters COLONEL ROLAND *and* ANNE, *coming in.*

COL. ROLAND. [*In a low voice*] Hell take your paper, Sir!

REPORTER. [*With a little involuntary skip*] Quite! Quite!

[*He goes out through the throng.*

COLONEL ROLAND *and* ANNE *stand by the table, Right Forward. He makes a motion of the hand to* MR. ODIHAM, *and bows to* LADY MORECOMBE.

MAN. [*With* THREE LADIES, *at the door*] I'm from the Air Ministry—could you manage to get us in?

CORONER'S C. [*Glancing at the card*] I'll see, Sir. . . . Now, then, please, only witnesses in this room. [*He shepherds out figures by the door, then turns to those in the body of the room*] All witnesses?

COL. ROLAND. I'm with my daughter—Mrs. Morecombe.

CORONER'S C. Oh! Very good. [*To* LADY MORECOMBE] And you, Madam?

LADY M. My son——

CORONER'S C. Indeed! [*Respectfully*] Ahem! I don't know if you wish to—er—view the proceedings, Madam? If so, I shall be happy to have a chair put for you.

LADY M. [*Standing up*] Yes. I will come.

CORONER'S C. [*Leading*] This way then, Madam.

LADY M. [*Avoiding* ANNE, *but looking up into* COLONEL ROLAND'S *face*] Nothing, I suppose? [*He shakes his head*] Courage!

COLONEL ROLAND nods, and she goes out, following the CLERK.

The room is now empty, but for the ODIHAMS, *the* MAID, ANNE, COLONEL ROLAND, *and a* CONSTABLE *standing in the open doorway.* FIGURES *are still bustling outside in the entrance lobby.*

COL. ROLAND. Sit down, my dear.

ANNE *sits Right of the table, and idly reaches for the paper, turning it over blankly as one does at the dentist's.* COLONEL ROLAND *stands grasping the back of her chair, gnawing his moustache. The* DETECTIVE *ap-*

pears in the doorway with a bit of paper in his hand. He moves quickly in a little and takes in the FIVE FIGURES, *of whom* ODIHAM *alone notices him—with a muttered "The blanky blank!" Then, moving back, he speaks to the* CONSTABLE.

DETECTIVE. [*In a low voice*] The three women—see they don't flit. I've got the officer, and the two doctors; that's the lot. [*The* CONSTABLE *nods*] Right, then! I'll come for them.

[*He goes.*

ANNE. [*Suddenly turning*] Don't come with me, Dad—*please!*

COL. ROLAND. Let you go alone, child? Impossible!

ANNE. Please, *please!* Father! I can't bear it, if you're there.

COL. ROLAND. My dear, I must see they treat you——

ANNE. I shall be all right, Dad—really I shall. It'll be a thousand times worse if you come. Please! [*She takes one of his buttons and twists it.*]

COL. ROLAND. [*Muttering*] Those harpies and cats—those writing monkeys—feasting on it!

ANNE. So long as *you* don't see, I shan't care.

COL. ROLAND. D'you think I'll not be seeing, if I stay here? I'll see every bit of it, as plain as your face.

ANNE. Nothing's so bad as it seems beforehand. [*With a smile*] Really and truly, I shall be all right.

COLONEL ROLAND *turns abruptly away,*

marches up, down, and puts his hand on her shoulder.

COL. ROLAND. So be it, then. I'll stay here, and God help me.

CONSTABLE. [*Moving in a step from the door*] The Coroner's taken his seat, ladies.

They look at him in silence. He moves back.

ODIHAM. Time 'e took something. Hangin' about! You'd think it was a ruddy first night—this! [*To the* MAID] I say, come down 'ere.

The MAID *moves down beside the* GIRL. ANNE *and the* COLONEL *watch silently.*

ODIHAM. She's not opened 'er mouth all mornin'. However's she goin' through with this? 'Ave you got a smellin' salt about yer?

[*The* MAID *shakes her head.*

ANNE. [*Going across*] Take one of these.

ODIHAM. Thank you, Ma'am. A sniff in time saves nine.

ANNE *breaks an ammonia capsule and waves it before* DAISY'S *face.*

ODIHAM. Rouse up, Daisy. Sniff.

The GIRL *sniffs apathetically.* ANNE *moves back.*

ODIHAM. [*To the* MAID] I never seen 'er like this in all me life. I say, would you kindly look after 'er in there? Reely I'm afraid to trust meself. I might come it unpleasant. I'll be 'andy 'ere when she comes back.

CONSTABLE. [*Taking a step*] Won't be three minutes now. The Jury 'ave gone to view the body.

DAISY. [*Starting up*] Oh! God!

There is a perfectly dead silence. The CONSTABLE, *an oldish, wary fellow, stares; the others are motionless, with their eyes on the girl. She sinks back into her seat, and sits as before.* ODIHAM *fans her with his hat. The* DETECTIVE *appears in the doorway, carefully out of sight of his victims, and signs to the* CONSTABLE.

CONSTABLE. Now, please, ladies.

ANNE. [*Advancing towards* DAISY] Ellen! [*The* MAID *takes the girl's arm. To* ODIHAM] We'll look after her, Mr. Odiham. [*Taking the* GIRL's *hand—firmly*] Come! We must see it through!

The GIRL *rises and goes between them like a sleep-walker. The* CONSTABLE *closes them in as they pass through the door. The* TWO MEN *stand as if at "Attention."*

COL. ROLAND. [*To himself*] I've seen men shot, but their eyes were bandaged. [*He continues to stand unmoving.*]

ODIHAM *shuffles to the table, takes up the paper, goes back with it to his seat, sits down with it on his knee, rubs his hand across his eyes, gives a sort of gulp, and says.*

ODIHAM. This Chelsea lot's pretty 'ot stuff. Wouldn't say but what they'll win this afternoon.

The COLONEL *starts, then moves, and sits on the table, facing* ODIHAM.

COL. ROLAND. Ah! They'll be a good team, I suppose.

A short silence. They listen. Then ODIHAM *takes out a pipe.*

ODIHAM. D'you think I could 'ave a smoke, Colonel?

COL. ROLAND. I shouldn't think so.

ODIHAM. Well, I must chance it. Can't stand it 'ere without. [*Filling his pipe*] Your daughter's a rare-plucked one, Colonel, if you'll excuse the liberty.

COL. ROLAND. Women are braver than men—no doubt of it.

ODIHAM. And yet they'll run from a mouse. You should see my girl with a black-beetle! Abrams on the sprint is nothing to 'er! [*Stops. With a jerk*] I think this Labour's come to stay, Colonel; but p'r'aps you're not a politician.

COL. ROLAND. Not since I cut my wisdom teeth.

ODIHAM. Ah! Public life! It's a put-up job.

The COLONEL'S *head goes round as if he heard a sound.* ODIHAM, *too, stays, pipe in hand, as if listening. They relax.*

ODIHAM. [*Holding up the paper*] Did you see these 'eadlines? "The Mysterious Suicide." "England's Greatest Flying Man." "Sensational Developments Expected." That's what's filled the 'ouse to-day. They're turnin' away money.

COL. ROLAND. Damn them.

ODIHAM. Everything's a show nowadays. If you get two sparrers scrappin' you'll have a ring round 'em in no time. T'other day I read about an American journalist who missed the show when that man

an' wife—you remember—went over Niagara Falls on a niceberg. There they was—slowly driftin' towards it for an 'our an' a 'alf; thousands watchin', and nobody could save 'em. Then a bloke thought of hangin' ropes down from the bridge; the man caught 'old of one all right, but the woman missed 'ers; so the man dropped 'is again and over they went together. The journalist said it was the greatest tradegy of 'is life that 'e 'adn't seen it.

COL. ROLAND. The beauty!

ODIHAM. Well, you can't say but what we do like to see other people put through it. What would you 'ave done, Colonel, with a show like that before yer very eyes?

COL. ROLAND. Run like a hare.

ODIHAM. [*Shaking his head*] Nao! Not when it come to the point. You'd 'a stood watchin' like the others, till your eyes dropped out. It's human nature to want to see all there is.

COL. ROLAND. I never would go to a bull-fight.

ODIHAM. [*Meditatively*] And yet you must 'ave seen a lot of blood in your time. [*Pause, while they listen*] Excuse me, but 'ave you a match? [*The* COLONEL *produces a box of matches*] Thank you. [ODIHAM *lights his pipe and blows a puff or two.*]

COL. ROLAND. What's that? [*They listen.*]

ODIHAM. I fancy it was a car. Some of them cars make very 'uman noises.

COL. ROLAND. Torturing women:

ODIHAM. [*Puffing*] Colonel, what made the Major do it? D'you think there was *another* woman in it?

COL. ROLAND. [*Making an impatient movement*] Do you take him for a Mormon?

ODIHAM. Well, there must ha' been 'ot stuff somewhere, to make him bust the boiler like that.

COL. ROLAND. God only knows why a man takes his own life!

ODIHAM. Ah! 'E 'as to know a lot.

CONSTABLE. [*Moving from the door*] No smoking in there, please.

ODIHAM removes his pipe and lays it on the seat. The CONSTABLE *moves back.*

ODIHAM. The Law wants plumbin', don't it? 'Tain't 'uman. [*They listen. Suddenly*] Well, I can't stick it 'ere without a smoke. [*He rises*] I think I'll go and 'ang about outside, Colonel.

COLONEL ROLAND nods. ODIHAM passes him, goes out, and is seen speaking to the CONSTABLE *in the lobby. The* COLONEL *sits down at the table with his back to the alcove, resting his head on his hands.*

CONSTABLE. [*Close to the door, speaking to a newcomer*] Whom do you want, Sir?

The newcomer comes in—he is seen to be DARREL.

DARREL. Mrs. Morecombe.

CONSTABLE. The widow? She's in Court now, but she'll be down before long, I daresay. If you'll wait in here? Perhaps I could get word for you of whether she's been taken yet. [*He receives a coin*] I'll do it, Sir.

DARREL. Thank you.

He comes in; strung up to the last pitch of intensity, he walks, unseeing, across to the long seat, picking up from it the paper, dropping it again, and passing up, Back, to the head of the table, where he stands looking towards the alcove. COLONEL ROLAND *has remained motionless, with his head on his hands.* DARREL *becomes conscious of him, and involuntarily covers the lower part of his face with his hand.*

CONSTABLE. [*Reappearing*] They've just got through with her, Sir.

COL. ROLAND. [*Coming out of his stillness*] With whom?

CONSTABLE. The widow, Sir. As she found the body, they took her first. [*To* DARREL] Sometimes witnesses comes out, and sometimes they stays—you can't tell.

The COLONEL *stares at him without replying. The* CONSTABLE *steps back into the lobby; the* COLONEL, *turning, becomes half-conscious of who* DARREL *is, gets up and moves a step or two towards him.*

DARREL. [*Answering his look*] Yes—I am. Colonel Roland, I suppose?

COL. ROLAND. [*Drawing himself up*] You have much to answer for.

DARREL. If it hadn't been for you, Sir, we should have gone off long ago.

COL. ROLAND. Do you suppose that I should wish an affair to be clandestine?

DARREL. No; but Anne——

COL. ROLAND. Why didn't you have the manliness to insist?

DARREL. [*Hotly*] I see no manliness in forcing the woman you love. She couldn't bear to hurt you.

COL. ROLAND. Then you should have waited till I was out of the way.

DARREL. Yes, Sir; but we are in love.

COL. ROLAND. That's no excuse for dishonour.

DARREL. Morecombe and she were quite estranged before I knew her.

COL. ROLAND. Is that true?

DARREL. Absolutely.

COL. ROLAND. Um! What are you going to do now?

DARREL. Marry her—take her abroad at once. I'd have cut off my hand to save her *that*— [*He jerks his head towards the door*] How long has she been there?

COL. ROLAND. One can die many deaths in ten minutes.

CONSTABLE. [*From lobby*] There's a gentleman for you in there, Madam.

DARREL. Anne!

ANNE *comes in. She has fixed red spots in her cheeks. She moves to the end of the table and sits down facing the audience, with her back to the two men.* DARREL *has moved quickly down Left of the table,* COLONEL ROLAND *to the back of her chair.*

DARREL. Anne! Darling!

ANNE *just shakes her head and does not answer. her lips quiver; her expression is that of one who has been through, without giving way, something too much for her nerves. She sits without movement, staring before her.*

COL. ROLAND. Shall we go, my dear?

[*No sound.*

DARREL. Anne! Speak!

ANNE [*Shakes her head*] I—may—be wanted—again.

[*She shivers, then controls herself.*

COL. ROLAND. By the Lord—it's too much!

DARREL *sinks on one knee and kisses her hand. No movement. He gets up abruptly and stands interrogating the* COLONEL.

COL. ROLAND. Water, Anne?

ANNE. Nothing.

DARREL *makes another impulsive movement, but the* COLONEL *beckons him, and they move up to the head of the table.*

COL. ROLAND. [*In a low voice*] Let her be! I saw a woman on the North-west Frontier once— Um! There's more than one kind of outrage. The nerves want time.

CONSTABLE'S VOICE. [*At the door*] You won't find room, Sir.

LIEUT. OSWALD'S VOICE. [*Outside*] But I tell you I've got something for the Coroner.

CONSTABLE. Step in here, then. [*Stepping in, fol-*

lowed by the speaker—a man about thirty, of a naval cut] Well, Sir, what is it; and I'll see what I can do for you.

He receives nothing but a card. DARREL *and the* COLONEL *have moved back, watching* ANNE.

CONSTABLE. [*After reading the card*] Lieutenant Oswald, His Majesty's Ship *Zéus*. [*Salutes.*]

OSWALD. I got this letter at Portsmouth, Constable, only this morning. The Coroner ought to have it at once. I've been on manœuvres—this is the first I've heard of this business. My poor old pal! [*Holding out an envelope.*]

CONSTABLE. [*Scrutinising envelope*] From the deceased?

OSWALD. Yes.

CONSTABLE. I'll get the Sergeant in charge, Sir.

OSWALD. [*Suddenly perceiving* ANNE, *who has turned and is staring at him*] Mrs. Morecombe! I'm so sor—— [*Breaking off at the look on her face*] I—I'm frightfully cut up.

ANNE. [*Bitterly*] The letter?

OSWALD. Only just reached me.

ANNE. Too late.

OSWALD. What——

The DETECTIVE *has entered, followed by the* CONSTABLE.

DETECTIVE. [*Brusquely*] Now, Sir, what's this? You've got a letter?

OSWALD *hands the letter. The* DETECTIVE

compares the handwriting on the envelope with that of other letters, then opens it and reads swiftly.

DETECTIVE. My God! Come with me, Sir!

[*He leads out, and* OSWALD *follows.*

The CONSTABLE *goes back to his place in the doorway.*

DARREL. Who was that?

COL. ROLAND. Morecombe's best man.

ANNE *has turned to the table, and is sitting with her forehead on her hand.*

Speak to her now! [*He moves up the room and stands with his back turned.* DARREL *goes to the front end of the table and bends over her.*]

DARREL. Anne!

ANNE. Who minds being skinned? Do I show? Am I bleeding? Their eyes!

[*Stir in the lobby.*

CONSTABLE. [*Moving in*] The Sergeant's sent down to say you won't be required further, Ma'am. [*Moves out.*]

DARREL. Come, Anne, come—out of this!

ANNE. [*Turning up her face with closed eyes*] Put my mask on, Geof—it's slipped!

DARREL. [*Touching her face*] Darling! [*He takes her arm and leads her out.*]

COL. ROLAND. [*Spinning round and coming quickly down*] Begad, I'd like um at the end of a pistol! [*He levels his hand as if to fire.*]

CONSTABLE. Beg pardon, Sir?

COL. ROLAND. [*Conscious of the comic*] Not you, my man.

CONSTABLE. Anything I can get you, Sir?

COL. ROLAND. Yes—human nature with its mouth open.

[*He goes out.*

The CONSTABLE'S *mouth opens; rolling his eyes, he looks round the empty room as if for damage done, adjusts a chair, takes up the paper, folds it; crosses to the far side and comes on* ODIHAM'S *pipe, takes it up rather as if he were arresting somebody, holds it out, looks at it, examining it as if it were a piece of evidence, then places it in his side pocket and buttons it up. Then, with a final look round he takes the paper and returns towards the door.*

ODIHAM'S VOICE. [*Outside*] Take her out in the air. Shan't be a tick; I left my pipe.

He comes in and crosses to the long bench. The CONSTABLE *regards him with an unmoved face.*

ODIHAM. [*Puzzled*] 'Ere's where I left it. [*To the* CONSTABLE] Seen a pipe?

CONSTABLE. What sort o' pipe?

ODIHAM. Briar—bit gone in the stem.

CONSTABLE. Any marks on it?

ODIHAM. Marks? What d'you think? Tattooed on the left forearm? Just a pipe.

CONSTABLE. [*Producing pipe*] This the article?

ODIHAM. That's it!

CONSTABLE. By rights I ought to hand it in at Scotland Yard. [*He seems to weigh the pipe.*]

ODIHAM. Aoh! I shouldn't like you to be wastin' your time over me. [*Holding out a bob*] 'Ow's that?

CONSTABLE. [*Taking the bob*] A pipe's a man's friend.

ODIHAM. [*Taking the pipe*] Ah! about the only one 'e 'as. 'Ave you got a light?

The CONSTABLE *hands him a box of matches and* ODIHAM *lights his pipe.*

Well, you 'aven't too cheery a job among the bodies —So long!

The CONSTABLE'S *mouth opens, but* ODIHAM *has hurried out.*

The CONSTABLE *puts the bob away and steps out into the lobby. His voice is heard.*

CONSTABLE. Now then, make way for the Jury, there! In here, gentlemen. You'll find all in order for considering your verdict. In here.

He comes back into the doorway. And the JURY *pass him one by one; eight decent men fresh from a painful scene, and divided in expression between relief and responsibility. The* FOREMAN, *a veterinary surgeon's assistant, has a letter in his hand.*

CONSTABLE. [*Moving in after them*] Got everything you want, gentlemen?

FOREMAN. Yes, thank you.

The CONSTABLE *goes out and closes the door.*

We might as well sit down while we're thinking it over.

FOUR JURYMEN *sit on the long seat, Left;* THREE *on chairs to Right of table. The* FOREMAN *sits at the head of the table.*

FOREMAN. Well, gentlemen, we're clear, I suppose, that deceased came by his death on Monday night last between eight and nine o'clock, in his own house at Kensington?

[*There is a general assent.*

That's agreed then. Now, did he take his own life? That's the second question we have to answer.

2ND JURYMAN. [*Next on Left of* FOREMAN—*a grey-headed man in a small way of business*] Can't be a doubt about that, after the letter, and what the doctors said. [*Pause.*]

FOREMAN. Anyone who has a doubt, give it a voice, please.

[*No voice.*

We're agreed, then. He took his own life. Now, what was his state of mind when he took it? That's the third question before us.

3RD JURYMAN [*Second on Right of* FOREMAN—*a goggle-eyed commercial traveller*] Ah! It'll take a bit of answerin', in my opinion. I'd like that letter read again, Mr. Foreman. It's a painful letter, and I'd like it read again.

FOREMAN. Very well! It's addressed to Lieutenant Oswald, H.M.S. *Zéus.*

5TH JURYMAN. [*Right front chair, a working jeweller, rather æsthetic*] Zeus—it's ancient Greek.

6TH JURYMAN. [*Left, at the front end of the seat—a self-owning barber and hard little nut*] Let's 'ave it in plain English.

FOREMAN. *Zéus*, Portsmouth. And it's headed from his own house: "17 Southern Place, Kensington. March 23rd"—the fatal Monday—"8.15 p.m." He put it precise, you see. This is the letter:—

"My dear old Pal,

"I write to you as my oldest and best friend. I am going off the deep end in a few minutes."

4TH JURYMAN. [*Right, next* FOREMAN—*a chemist*] One moment, Mr. Foreman. Speaking as a chemist: "Off the deep end" is an expression I've heard used, but never in that particular connection.

6TH JURYMAN. Speakin' as an 'airdresser, it means losin' your 'air.

FOREMAN. It can't mean anything here but what he was going to do.

3RD JURYMAN. That's right. Go on.

FOREMAN. [*Resuming*] "Off the deep end in a few minutes. Neither you nor anyone else, not even my mother, or Anne in the days before we split, have known that I have twice been clean off my chump. It was that, you know, which really botched up my life with Anne. She wanted children and I daren't, and couldn't tell her why. I simply couldn't tell anybody. The first time was soon after the war. I was up in Scotland fishing—a very remote place: for three days it was all darkness. I had only a gillie with me, and I swore him to silence. The second time was just before we definitely split—I

was away in Belgium over that A.B.Z. parachute design of mine. For two days I wandered about, out of my wits, and came to myself in a wood. My dear old man, I don't suppose you can realise what it means to be at the mercy of a thing like that, to have the feeling of its coming on me—slowly, slowly creeping on me again. And not to know whether next time won't be the last." [*The* FOREMAN *coughs*] "I go about in"—here's a word I can't read—"fer"—no—ah!—"terror"—that's it, "terror." "I've known for days that it's coming on me again now. I can't stick it, old man. Better for myself and everybody that I should clear out. Good-bye, and God bless you. Comfort my poor mother.

Your old Pal,
COLIN MORECOMBE."

THE FOREMAN'S *voice has been distinctly husky during the reading of the last words, and an audible sniff has been heard from the* 3RD JURYMAN. *In fact, all the* JURYMEN *have shown signs of discomfort, except the youngest, almost a boy, and the* 6TH JURYMAN, *who have listened unmoved.*

5TH JURYMAN. It's a dreadfully sad letter.

6TH JURYMAN. The question is, is it a sane letter? The Coroner 'ad a word to say on that. But it struck me that gentleman was thinkin' more of 'imself than of deceased.

7TH JURYMAN. [*On the Left, second from front—a bright-haired greengrocer*] You can't honestly say

there's a word in it you or I couldn't have written. He's got everything exact, even to the split with his wife.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! We needn't think about *that* lady.

3RD JURYMAN. No better than she should be, I should say.

5TH JURYMAN. Well, there was his own affair with the girl.

2ND JURYMAN. Pity they brought that in, in my opinion. The Coroner was right to stop that evidence, when he got the letter. After all, the poor fellow's gone.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! I rather think that 'tec put his foot in his mouth, there.

4TH JURYMAN. Saved a faint, anyway, stopping her evidence—never saw a girl so white: and I've had some in my shop.

FOREMAN. We must keep to the point—his sanity.

6th JURYMAN. He was sane enough when he took the girl to Richmond, anyway.

5TH JURYMAN. The day before—you can't count that.

7TH JURYMAN. The letter was the last thing he did; we needn't go further back than that.

FOREMAN. To my mind, gentlemen, the important words are the "slowly creeping on me again." As a Vet, I can tell you that a dog knows when he's going mad. And you may take it from me that as soon as he knows it, you've got to destroy him—practically he's mad already. Is a *man* still sane

when he feels insanity creeping on him? That's the *real* question.

6TH JURYMAN. If he was insane when he wrote that letter, we're all as mad as 'atters.

7TH JURYMAN. There it is, you see: the Coroner warned us not to bring him in of unsound mind unless we truly felt he was.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! that gentleman—*full* of his own position! Did he pay any attention to that question I asked him? Not 'e!

3RD JURYMAN. [*Suddenly*] Hero in the war! I remember that flight of 'is perfectly. And there he lies —poor feller!

5TH JURYMAN. I'm thinking of his family.

6TH JURYMAN. We're not concerned with the widder in this case; *she* 'as 'er consolations.

5TH JURYMAN. His mother hasn't.

6TH JURYMAN. Ah! That was the little one in black.

FOREMAN. There's always someone to be hurt. Well, gentlemen, it must be one thing or the other.

[*A silence.*

7TH JURYMAN. I can't see a madman using the words "off his chump."

3RD JURYMAN. Why not? It's a very 'andy expression.

7TH JURYMAN. I think if a man was mad, he wouldn't use slang.

2ND JURYMAN. Some men'd use slang in their graves. [*To his neighbour—the boy,* 8TH JURYMAN] What do *you* say?

8TH JURYMAN. [*Startled*] I? Oh! Mad.

4TH JURYMAN. Mr. Foreman, I'd like to say a word for the Coroner. I thought him very fair; and on the whole I should say he was against Insanity.

6TH JURYMAN. Too many insane verdicts lately: that's what's the matter with him. We'll vote independent of that gentleman.

FOREMAN. Very well! I'll take a vote. . . . Those in favour of unsound mind hold up their hands.

His own, and those of the 2ND, 3RD, 5TH, *and* 8TH JURYMEN *are held up.*

Contrary?

Those of the 7TH *and* 4TH *are held up. The* 6TH *does not hold up his at all.*

6TH JURYMAN. I thought so; not agreed—we want a little more discussion. They've brought us away from our businesses—let 'em wait for us.

7TH JURYMAN. Honestly, I don't see how he could have written that letter if he'd been insane at the time of writing.

4TH JURYMAN. I really think gentlemen, we should follow the Coroner, with his experience.

6TH JURYMAN. Well, I don't.

5TH JURYMAN [*Heatedly*] Then why didn't you hold up your hand?

6TH JURYMAN. Wait and see.

FOREMAN. [*Calming them*] Now, gentlemen, please. If you'd like to have *my* views. I've been on a Coroner's Jury before. In my opinion there's *always* a doubt in these cases, and it does no harm to anyone to

give the benefit of it to the deceased. That's human nature, and human nature's the best guide, after all. Who can tell to a tick when a man's over the edge? I don't see what they want to ask the question for at all. Where and when did a man die? Did he die by his own hand? Yes. But what was his state of mind? No. Sound or unsound, he's dead. In this case he tells us himself he was mad, or on the point of it. The benefit o' the doubt, gentlemen.

4TH JURYMAN. Mr. Foreman, I think you're right, after all.

2ND JURYMAN. Certainly he is. It's common sense. Speaking from the business point of view: am I going to do a deal with a man who writes a letter like that? Course I'm not. That's the plain test.

7TH JURYMAN. Well, if you put it that way—I'm sure I don't want to be inhuman.

6TH JURYMAN. He was as sane as you or me when he wrote that letter.

FOREMAN. Do I understand that you follow the Coroner, after all, Sir?

6TH JURYMAN. Not much! Unsound mind, every time.

FOREMAN. We're agreed, then. The deceased took his own life, in his own house, between eight and nine in the evening, on Monday last, when of unsound mind. Shall we offer an expression of sympathy with his family?

6TH JURYMAN. Not the widder—confine it to his mother.

FOREMAN. Well, perhaps that'll meet the case better.

[*General assent.*

Come along then, gentlemen. We'll go back and give it them.

[*They file out.*

The CONSTABLE *comes in, looking over the room as if for another pipe.* LADY MORECOMBE *comes in.*

LADY M. Officer!

CONSTABLE. Madam!

LADY M. Can I see the reporters before they go?

CONSTABLE. I'm afraid it's not in the book, Madam, for any witness——

LADY M. I was not a witness.

CONSTABLE. Ah! I remember—you're the deceased's mother. I don't know, I'm sure, Madam. It's not in my department. [*He stands stock.*]

LADY M. I know that. [*She puts a note into his hand*] I only want you to get me the first who comes down.

CONSTABLE. Well, I see no reason, Ma'am, why you shouldn't see the Press, as one private person to another.

LADY M. Then please——!

CONSTABLE. I will, Ma'am; very glad to do you the service.

[*He goes out.*

LADY MORECOMBE *moves to the end of the table and stands trembling, working her*

lips. The CONSTABLE *returns, followed by the* REPORTER, FORMAN.

CONSTABLE. This is the first down, Madam. Lady wants to see you, Sir.

He withdraws. The REPORTER *moves towards* LADY MORECOMBE.

REPORTER. Yes, Lady Morecombe? Excuse me, I'm in a hurry.

LADY M. I've been rude to you, I'm afraid. Please forgive me.

REPORTER. Oh! Our backs are broad, thank you.

LADY M. As a human being in distress, I beg you: please don't put that girl into your report!

REPORTER. [*Affected*] Lady Morecombe, I—I must hand it in; but I'll gladly ask them not to mention her. I daresay they won't; her evidence didn't matter as it turned out. You left before the verdict. It's "Unsound mind," if that's any consolation to you.

CONSTABLE [*Appearing*] Here's another for you, Madam. Press Association.

2ND REPORTER. [*From just within the doorway*] What is it?

LADY M. My son's name, Sir. The girl——

2ND REPORTER. Oh! That's all right, Ma'am. The Coroner's just said she mustn't be mentioned.

REPORTER. Thank the Lord! I'm *so* glad, Lady Morecombe!

LADY MORECOMBE *hides her face, overcome for the first time. The* 2ND REPORTER, *with a sound of sympathy, follows the* 1ST *out.*

LADY MORECOMBE *has turned to the wall, Left, weeping silently behind her handkerchief.* THREE LADIES *and the* MAN *from the Air Ministry have come into the alcove.*

THE MAN. Well, the show's over. I've sent for the car.

1ST LADY. I'd no idea it'd be so frightfully interesting, John.

2ND LADY. I've always wanted to see a case.

3RD LADY. Never was so thrilled in my life as when that girl——

2ND LADY. Oh! The wife's evidence was much the most exciting——

1ST LADY. She was rather wonderful, I thought. It must have been a nasty jar to have to——

3RD LADY. There's nothing like real life, after all. Beats the theatre hollow. Only it was *much* too short.

THE MAN. Of course the verdict was tosh. A man isn't insane when he knows what he's doing.

1ST LADY. But I thought Juries always said "Insane" as a matter of course?

3RD LADY. Wasn't the Coroner amusin'? So professional!

2ND LADY. Well, poor man, what else *could* he be?

THE MAN. Morecombe's a real loss.

3RD LADY. It *was* a piece of luck the letter only coming like that—all the drama was in seeing the witnesses——

THE MAN. Pretty rough on his wife, and that girl!

2ND LADY. Oh! well, bad luck, of course. Still, *that* was the really exciting part.

1ST LADY. Thanks awfully, John, for bringing us down. It was *too* thrilling!

THE MAN. Hsssh!

A sudden silence comes over them; they have become aware of the black figure of LADY MORECOMBE *standing close by, looking at them.*

3RD LADY. Er— The car *must* be there by now!

Like a bunch of frightened poultry they fluster through the doorway and are lost in the throng outside.

LADY M. [*To herself—very low*] The Show is over.

CURTAIN.

THE END.

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